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Christ Nazified: The History and Legacy of Christian Anti-Judaism in the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche

Michael Casey W. Woolf

University of Tennessee - Knoxville, mwoolf@utk.edu

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**Christ Nazified: The History and Legacy of Christian Anti-Judaism
in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche***

by Michael Casey W. Woolf

A Senior Honors Thesis submitted to the Department of Religious Studies,
University of Tennessee, in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Approved by:

Dr. Mark Hulsether, Honors Thesis Advisor

Dr. Christine Shepardson, Second Reader

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Chapter 1: Christ Nazified

With the rise of Hitler in 1933, the two confessions of Germany, Protestantism and Catholicism, faced a tenuous position in Germany. How would Germany's new savior, Adolf Hitler, react to the alternate sources of authority represented by the confessions? Although Hitler initially placated religious leaders with promises of tolerance and a relative degree of autonomy, within the first year of his chancellorship and consolidation of power it became obvious that he would be unrelenting in his pursuit of total *Gleichschaltung* (coordination). All sources of meaning and power would be forced into cooperation with the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or the National Germany Worker's Party, National Socialism). Such forcible coordination inevitably produced top-down, institutional changes within German Protestantism, including the creation of a new entity, the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (German Evangelical Church), under one Reich bishop. In this new church, portrayals and narratives concerning Christianity's most central figure, Jesus, were stripped of their Jewish context, having been replaced by a racially acceptable, Aryan alternative. In accordance with the NSDAP's ideology, non-Aryan clergy were removed from their posts, while non-Aryan laity were similarly expelled from their congregations in late 1941. Resistance to the changes in German Protestantism was led by such figures as Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer under the banner of the Confessing Church.

This thesis will seek to prove that the antisemitism¹ of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, as expressed in its liturgy, worship, and exegesis, builds on the foundation of Christian anti-Judaism, here exemplified by Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Luther, but also represents a divergence from that anti-Judaism on the grounds of race, a charge that both distances Christianity from the Reich Church's syncretism and forces the realization that without Christian anti-Judaism's contribution, the Reich Church could never have promulgated its antisemitic policies in the ways that are shown in the first chapter of this thesis. Resistance to the Reich Church's policies and theological reflection on the Nazi regime of violence and the *Shoah* also act as alternative legacies within the Christian tradition, both acknowledging the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism and acting as a counterweight to that negative legacy. This positive legacy of resistance, acknowledgment, and reflection runs through Bonhoeffer to Niemöller and their successors, exemplified by Dorothee Sölle.

Primarily, this thesis seeks to forge a middle path between the confessional historians who regard the Confessing Church and its resistance to the Third Reich's institutional changes as "true" Christianity and the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* as inauthentic Christianity, thereby softening the impact of Christian anti-Judaism on the Reich Church's policies, and historians who credit Christian anti-Judaism with having led directly to the Reich Church's policies. Instead of ignoring the connections between anti-Judaism and antisemitism or treating them as interchangeable, I add my voice to scholars who recognize the importance that anti-Judaism had in preparing the way for antisemitism, and therefore the Reich Church's policies, all the while emphasizing that they are indeed different concepts; anti-Judaism was religion-based and decried Jews on the basis of their adherence to Judaism, while antisemitism was infused with the

¹ In this discussion, I have chosen to use the term antisemitism instead of the hyphenated anti-Semitism. The argument is best phrased by Susannah Heschel who believes the hyphenated term gives rise to the false belief that there is some sort of "Semitism" that people are against.

nineteenth-century developments of race, social Darwinism, and nationalism. In the end, the Reich Church represents both continuity and divergence from Christian traditions of anti-Judaism, a recognition that neither absolves Christian traditions of guilt, nor allows for cheap, simple equations of Christian anti-Judaism with Nazism.

This work also demonstrates that the *Kirchenkampf* and *Shoah* are key events that had a substantial impact on the development of twentieth-century Protestant thought. The *Kirchenkampf* produced the influential Barmen Declaration and a declaration of *status confessionis* from the Confessing Church camp; both reactions carried weight in their context and in their application to other social issues of the twentieth century, such as South African apartheid and the emergence of “new Hitlers.” The *Shoah* forced a reevaluation of the nature of God’s transcendence and immanence, a development I trace through the Death of God movement with a brief excursus on the thought of one prominent theologian, Dorothee Sölle. The contrasts between the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism and this positive legacy of Bonhoeffer, Niemöller, and Sölle represent part of ongoing contestation for cultural hegemony—that is, for the exercise of power through what is taken for granted as common sense, in this case through questions about who can speak authoritatively for the Christian tradition. One cannot view the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism without at least partially balancing it with positive legacies based on the Confessing Church. One of the central aims of this thesis, then, is to resist the temptation to view the role of Christianity in the Third Reich as black and white. It is more complex than that, instead representing shades of gray that become either more or less visible in specific instances.

With these purposes in mind, I have chosen to divide my work into three chapters. The first chapter provides the context for my discussion of anti-Judaism and Christianity by

discussing, in detail, the changes in German Protestantism during the regime of the NSDAP. As such, the following chapter is vital; it represents an opening framework and presupposition for discussions throughout this thesis. The second chapter focuses on the development of anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish rhetoric in Late Antiquity. In it, I discuss three important figures in anti-Judaism's development: Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. These three Church Fathers act as representative figures since it is impossible to delineate fully the breadth of development of anti-Judaism in one chapter, but by analyzing their contribution to its development, one gains the ability to speak about Christian anti-Judaism's contribution to the Reich Church's policies. The third chapter analyzes Martin Luther's contribution to ecclesiology in Germany, anti-Jewish rhetoric, and how that rhetoric was reified by the NSDAP. This chapter serves as a bridge from chapter two to the conclusion, analyzing not just Martin Luther's anti-Judaism but also NSDAP appropriations of that legacy. Thus, it transitions toward my conclusion, which tackles the issues at hand through discussing nationalism, race, and Social Darwinism, as well as showing how those influenced the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. I will demonstrate that while there were continuities with the Christian legacy of anti-Judaism within the Reich Church, there were also divergences. In this way, the German Christian movement represents a syncretism³ between Nazi ideology and Christian tradition. Finally, I have included a discussion about the positive theological responses of people who critiqued and resisted the *Kirchenkampf* and the NSDAP's regime of violence with the hopes that their legacies can be the foundation of a productive and just form of Christianity..

³ Kamstra, J.H., *Op de Grens tussen Theologie en Godsdienstfenomenologie*, Leiden: Brill, 1970, 9-10, translated by: Michael Pye, as quoted in: *Dialogue and Syncretism: an Interdisciplinary Approach*, 10. I choose to use the definition of syncretism found in this work: "the coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or for example *in social structures*."

Two Preliminary Examples: The Confessing Church and the Seamless Robe of Christ

In a discussion of the German *Kirchenkampf* (Church Struggle) of the 1930s and 40s it is perhaps best to begin with a discourse on some well-known figures and representative events. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor executed for his involvement in an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler and one of the twentieth-century martyrs represented at Westminster Abby, provides such an opportunity, as does Martin Niemöller, an anti-Nazi church activist who spent eight years in a concentration camp for his resistance and later became President of the World Council of Churches. Bonhoeffer represents one form of active resistance to the changes introduced in the 1930s by the NSDAP's policy of *Gleichschaltung* (forcible coordination) for German Protestantism, an attempt to bring Protestant theology and ecclesiastical structure in line with Party ideology, as when Hitler contended, "the Nationalist Socialist State will not tolerate institutions...[that maintain] an attitude of independence or neutrality."⁵ Similar to the cries of the proponents of monepiscopacy in Late Antiquity, the NSDAP declared that there was "one Reich, one People," and, following this thought, there could be only "one church."⁶ Needless to say, if the church was going to represent the values of the Third Reich, major changes, touching on the basic nature of twentieth-century German Protestantism, would have to be made. According to Bonhoeffer, "those who claim to be building the church [through the abovementioned changes to ecclesiastical structure and theology] are, without a doubt, already at work at its destruction; unintentionally and unknowingly, they will construct a temple to idols."⁷

⁵ Smidt, Dietmar *Pastor Niemöller*, New York: Doubleday, 1959, 88. According to Niemöller, Hitler himself said this.

⁶ Bergen, Doris L., *The Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 44. This cry mirrors that of early Christian proponents of monepiscopacy: "One God, one bishop!" and was most likely an intentional allusion to such a movement.

⁷ As quoted in Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 1.

As we will discuss more fully in chapter four, words of resistance like these gave birth to the Confessing Church, the resistance movement to the Reich Church's theologians headed by the dominating presences of Niemöller and Bonhoeffer. Because of the changes Bonhoeffer observed emerging in the church, he was unafraid to make his opinion clear: "Whoever breaks from the Confessing Church [thereby siding with the NSDAP] separates himself from salvation."⁸ In Bonhoeffer's mind, "there [was] no doubt that a *status confessionis* [had] arrived."⁹ This was no mere difference of opinion, for "We [Nazi Christians and the Confessing Church] share neither the same God, nor the same faith, nor the same inspiration"; this was a difference in sanctity and faith on the deepest levels.¹⁰ For Niemöller and the Confessing Church, it was blasphemy to think that "Jesus of Nazareth would share his sovereignty for a time with a new Christ [Hitler], that the Gospel...should compromise...with the new myth."¹¹ It is important to note that these men, though united in their resistance to the policies of the NSDAP and sharing most of the same sentiments, even influencing each other, executed their resistance through different means. Bonhoeffer was unafraid to help plot an assassination, which even his own relative, Emmi Bonhoeffer, admits would have only resulted in a glorification of Hitler as a national savior, while, by contrast, Niemöller was a proponent of nonviolent resistance.¹² In the

⁸ Barnett, Victoria. *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 96-7.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, "Letter from Berlin, September 9, 1933," *A Testament to Freedom: the Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Edited by Geffry Kelly and Burton Nelson, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990. See *Faith and South Africa*: Literally, "state of confession [or confessing]," denoting a "a term used in times of special need, when the Gospel is being threatened, and a clear confession of faith by the Christian community is necessary."

¹⁰ Smidt, *Pastor Niemöller*, 99.

¹¹ Niemöller. Martin, *God is My Fuhrer*, New York: Alliance, 1941, 37-38. The epithet "of Nazareth" roots Christ in his historical and geographical context, in direct opposition to the purported Aryan Christ.

¹² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 183. "As long as Hitler was successful, his murder would have only led to a *Dolchstoß* [knife in the back] legend."

end, both were brave enough to claim God, as they knew him through their vision of German Protestantism, as their Führer. If God was Führer, Hitler was not.

Although Bonhoeffer and Niemöller present an attractive narrative of good Christians versus the evil pseudo-Christian Nazis, the reality is neither as simple nor as toothsome. Thus, let us consider, alongside the examples of Bonhoeffer and Niemöller, another less edifying story - the chronicle of the priceless relic of the seamless robe of Jesus. This narrative illustrates clearly the difficult nature of the *Kirchenkampf* and the extent to which “good” (read: ordinary, representative) Christians were drawn into the Nazi regime of violence and allowed their religious structure to be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. The passion narrative of the Gospel of John speaks of Christ’s seamless robe and describes how the soldiers who crucified Jesus cast lots for it.¹³ This robe is traditionally said to have been discovered by St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, and brought back to Trier for display. The robe has rested in Trier Cathedral ever since, only occasionally and irregularly becoming available for viewing.¹⁴ Most of the time such a holy relic is kept hidden in its *Heiltumskammer* (holy relic chamber), adding to its sense of mystery. However, in the twentieth century, this relic was available for viewing on three distinct occasions.

One of these was 1933, when the Church threw open its doors and declared a jubilee in honor of the Papacy and the Third Reich’s signing of the *Reichskonkordat*, which made the Vatican the first foreign power to sign a bilateral treaty with the Third Reich. Hitler himself was

¹³ John 19:23-24, NRSV.

¹⁴ This relic has only been displayed 16 times since its “discovery” in the 4th century: 1513, 1514, 1515, 1516, 1517, 1524, 1531, 1538, 1545, 1655, 1810, 1844, 1891, 1933, 1959, 1996. “A Rare Showing of the Robe,” *Life Magazine*, Vol. 74, No. 12, 1959, 67. Whether or not Helena actually brought it back is doubtful, but, according to Bishop Matthias Wehr, “it has been sanctified by the prayers of centuries.”

invited to this celebration of unity, although he sent his regrets on July 20.¹⁵ At the unveiling of the relic, Franz Bornewasser, Bishop of Trier, and one of Hitler's most important Catholic supporters announced that "with raised heads and firm step we have entered the new Reich and we are prepared to serve it with all the might of our body and soul."¹⁶ The Roman Catholic Church effectively abrogated its previous edicts restricting Catholics from participating in the NSDAP's hierarchy and embraced the Nazis as their best hope for full participation in German civic life, withdrawing their support for the Catholic Centre Party. As a result of their embrace, they received state-sanctioned protection, but, at the same time, they forfeited many of their rights. Clergy were no longer allowed to participate in government, and bishops were forced to swear oaths of loyalty to uphold the civil government, making the Roman Catholic Church in Germany subservient in many respects to the ruling authorities.

James Carroll, award-winning novelist and columnist for the *Boston Globe*, recounts in his recent work *Constantine's Sword* that upon a visit to the Trier Cathedral he asked his guide why there was such enthusiasm for National Socialism in 1933. His guide responded, with a shrug, "There was among Catholics a feeling that things would work out."¹⁷ How did the average Roman Catholic, not to mention the church's hierarchy, come to place their hopes for political actualization and relevance in such a movement? Was there not something inherently anti-Christian in the movement?

The answer, more complicated and convoluted than a simple dichotomy between "real Christians" and Nazis, is perhaps that the National Socialist regime framed its expressions in a

¹⁵ Helmreich, Ernst Christian, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979, 245-246.

¹⁶ Blackbourn, *Marpigen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany*. Oxford: OUP, 1993, 367-377.

¹⁷ Carroll, James, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, a History*, Boston: Houghton Miffler, 2001, 228.

decidedly Christian manner. Its theology, in many cases, reiterated Christian anti-Judaism, while in others, it broke from that Christian tradition, especially concerning the Reich Church's ideological mandate for viewing the Jews as a race as opposed to religion. Exploring and clarifying the continuities with and divergences from Christian tradition, specifically its anti-Judaism, are primary goals of this thesis.

The NSDAP and Its Ideological Relationship to German Protestantism

To order to begin an analysis of the German Church conflict, let us consider the NSDAP's ideological relationship to Christianity as expressed in formal written statements, declarations, private memorandums, letters, political policies, and agendas. In the "Party Program," formulated in 1920, Hitler laid out his formal relationship with Christianity: "We insist upon freedom for all religious confession in the state, providing they do not endanger its existence or offend the German race's sense of decency and morality."¹⁸ Initially, as part of this Party Program, he promised freedom for all confessions, as long as they remained docile and did not threaten the state; he also made it clear that neither Catholics nor Protestants had to abandon Christianity to support National Socialism. However, the above passage is "commonly regarded as a product of caution, meant to allay fears among religious peoples by posing as essentially favorable to Christianity."¹⁹ As a result, one must realize that the above statement might not be a true representation of the NSDAP's intentions. Likewise, in a 1933 policy statement, Hitler reinforced the party's ties to Christianity by making it clear that "the national government

¹⁸ Hitler, Adolf, "Programme of the NDSAP, 1920," *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, Grand Rapids, 1981, 1.

¹⁹ Steigmann-Gall, Richard. *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conception of Christianity, 1919-1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 14.

regards the two Christian confessions as the most important factors for the preservation of our national culture.”²⁰ He even called Christianity “the unshakeable foundation of our national life and morality,” and ended his statement by proclaiming that the “rights of the churches will not be restricted, nor will their relationship to the state be changed.”²¹ Hitler also made standard Christian references in his conversations, expressing his wish that, in Germany, “people stop just talking superficially of God’s will, and actually fulfill God’s will, and not let God’s word be desecrated.”²¹ In 1922, Hitler wrote that “he regarded Christ’s struggle as direct inspiration for his own,” referring to him as “the true God.”²² These public references made it clear that Hitler was unafraid of referencing orthodox Christian concepts to talk about his mission, and even saw the NSDAP’s mission as linked inexorably to Christianity. Since Hitler was the undisputed leader of the NSDAP, this reference reinforced an amenable relationship with Christianity.

Although the formal, public relationship between the NSDAP and Christianity was that of partnership and mutual progress, Hitler also saw the NSDAP’s relationship with the confessions as that of protector and even savior. Speaking of a time before the advent of National Socialism, he said, “liberalism was opposed to the Church, while Marxism was anti-religious. But that time is past.”²³ When the NSDAP came to power, it sought to safeguard Christianity from godless Marxism, making both confessions the party’s dependents and, on some level, subordinating them to the directives of their protector and savior; the confessions, according to party ideology, was indebted to the NSDAP. Additionally, when he gained power, Hitler came to

²⁰ Hitler, Adolf, “Policy Statement by Hitler, 23 March 1933,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 9.

²¹ Steigmann-Gall, Richard. *The Holy Reich*, 26.

²² Steigmann-Gall, Richard, *The Holy Reich*, 27.

²³ Hitler, Adolf, “Speech delivered at Koblenz, August 26, 1934,” Norman H. Baynes, ed., *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942, 386.

see “the German nation... politically, economically, and socially...[as his] personal property.”²⁴ Hitler’s *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle) extended into ecclesiastical affairs, enabling him to enact his goal of *Gleichschaltung*.²⁵ Despite Hitler’s words in 1933 about the unshakeable nature of Christianity and the religious freedom of all confessions, Hitler saw the confessions, both Protestant and Catholic, as ultimately under his control, like all aspects of Germany, and therefore subject to *Gleichschaltung* in order to form a firm national identity, the *Volk*. Indeed, he felt that the Church should be thankful for such coordination, “because God had created the nation as one of his orders, the church had an obligation to serve the *Volk*: ‘the church has every reason to be happy about the development of the *völkisch* movement’.”²⁶

Needless to say, all this implies that the relationship between the confessions and the NSDAP was complicated. The NSDAP simultaneously promised religious freedom and expected obedience from the confessions as a bureau of government in service to the *Volk*. It even commanded them to be happy about the situation. However, while Hitler’s words may have said one thing about the relationship of the NSDAP to Christianity, his policies and theories of government told a different story. In the end, Hitler wanted to coordinate the Confessions, like every part of German life, to better serve his nation.

Positive Christianity

Contained in Hitler’s aforementioned “Party Program” was a “cleverly...undefined” reference to “positive Christianity”: “the party as such represents the standpoint of a Positive

²⁴ Hermann, Stewart, *It's Your Souls We Want*, New York: AMS Press, 1943, 3.

²⁵ King, Christine Elizabeth, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982, 10.

²⁶ Steigmann-Gall, Richard, *The Holy Reich*, 34.

Christianity, without tying itself to a particular confession.”²⁷ But what did this term indicate? What did a positive Christian believe? To begin with, positive, or German, Christianity saw itself as an “affirmative, truly national faith in Christ,” meaning that the German Christians intended to support the current National Socialist regime.²⁸ This came as no surprise, for the German Christians were mobilized “at the behest of the NSDAP to mobilize Protestants behind National Socialism and to increase the influence of the Party in...church elections.”¹⁸ Perhaps Hans Kerrl, the Minister of Church Affairs, said it best in 1935, when he stated flatly that “National Socialism is positive Christianity.”²⁹ Within this vision of a national faith lay a mission to “call men to the decisive battle against Marxism” – which was understood as “the enemy of God,” as well as of National Socialism, and as such, of Germany itself.³⁰ Naturally, a religious group that so strongly associated with National Socialism would align against its political antithesis. Indeed, Joseph Göbbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, characterized reality itself as a dualistic “struggle between Christ and Marx. Christ: the principle of love. Marx: the principle of hate.”³¹ Another NSDAP leader characterized Marxism “the enemy of private property, the national state, and Christianity.”³² Likewise, German Christians identified themselves as “Christ Socialists,” waging war against Marxism on the basis of religious principle.³³

²⁷ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 14.

²⁸ “Guiding Principles of the ‘German Christians’, 26 May 1932,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 5.

²⁹ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 44.

³⁰ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 44.

³¹ Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 44.

³² Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 45.

³³ Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 46.

Given Positive or German Christianity's deep link to National Socialism, NSDAP's racial policies organically carried over into the religious sphere. The German Christians, naturally, "oppose[d] any mission to the Jews in Germany as long as the Jews have...citizenship and there is therefore a danger of bastardization and an obscuring of racial differences."³⁴ Göbbels made it abundantly clear that, in his view, there was no connection between Christ and Judaism: "Christ cannot have been a Jew. I do not need to prove this with science or scholarship. It is so!"³⁵ Ludwig Müller, Reich Bishop of the German Evangelical Church, echoed this line when he said that "we [German Christians] must emphasize with all decisiveness that Christianity did not grow out of Judaism but developed in opposition to Judaism... There is no bond between them, rather the sharpest opposition."³⁶ In general, the German Christians opposed Judaism on the grounds of race, in line with the National Socialist stance, and also denied the fact that Christianity had any connection to Judaism. How could it, when the "struggle between Christ and Antichrist was the archetype of the eternal battle between the Aryan and the Semite, between good and evil"? To the NSDAP and the positive Christians, "race was God's law," and to even attempt a conversion of Jews was to blur the racial lines set in place by God.³⁷ After all, "faith in Christ does not destroy race, it deepens and sanctifies it."³⁸

Following this line of thought, it was natural for German Christians to conclude that "baptism never made a Jew into a German."³⁹ And how could a Jew become German except by

³⁴ "Guiding Principles of the 'German Christians', 26 May 1932," *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 6.

³⁵ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 32.

³⁶ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 21.

³⁷ Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 29.

³⁸ Guiding Principles of the 'German Christians', 26 May 1932," *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 5.

³⁹ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 22.

changing his or her race? He could not, since, as a popular German Christian idiom had it, although “baptism may be quite useful, . . . it cannot straighten a nose.”⁴⁰ To the German Christians there was an “ultimate impossibility of Christianizing nonwhites.”⁴¹ The stance became clear: one must be Aryan to be Christian.

In this Aryanized Christianity, which utterly opposed the mixing of Christianity and Judaism, the German Christians changed their “theological understanding of masculinity, from the pure-hearted Jesus . . . to a tough, hard-hearted Jesus.”⁴² Manliness became a central characteristic of Christ. Gone were the representations of charity, mercy, and grace, replaced by visions of Christ as “harsh and relentless.”⁴³ Dietrich Eckart put it this way: “in Christ, the embodiment of all manliness, we find all that we need.”⁴⁴ Following such a Christ, “the people’s church . . . would be a ‘manly’ church that enshrined and promoted masculine qualities,” where the “feminine traits antithetical to National Socialist values” would be absent.⁴⁵ In the German Christian mindset, the church was to “fight ruthlessly, to exhibit hardness and heroism, to follow orders with enthusiasm,” while “men too old or too young to be soldiers, homosexuals, and men unwilling or unable to fight” were to be excluded.⁴⁶ The virtue of *Männlichkeit* (manliness) mirrored the ideals and virtues of National Socialism, eschewing the *weichlich* (weak) and

⁴⁰ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 86.

⁴¹ Heschel, Susannah, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 28.

⁴² Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 53.

⁴³ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 21.

⁴⁴ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 18.

⁴⁵ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 61.

⁴⁶ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 63.

effeminate virtues of Christ and praising both the soldiers of Christendom and National Socialism. There was no room for mercy and forgiveness in the manly church of the positive Christians, the “self-styled ‘storm troopers of Christ’.”⁴⁷

The Foundation of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*

German Christians wasted little time implementing their vision, acting swiftly after Hitler became Chancellor in January of 1933. On May 16, 1933, they issued a statement demanding the “unification of the evangelical provincial churches into one German Evangelical Church.”⁴⁸ On July 11, 1933, they used political pressure to codify a new constitution for the German Evangelical Church, providing a more centralized church with a Reich Bishop (*Reichsbischof*) “at the head of the Church.”⁴⁹ Instead of twenty-eight provincial churches, there would be only one Reich Church – The German Evangelical Church - with the Reich Bishop at its head. The NSDAP’s *Gleichschaltung* plan became a reality; the church was effectively synchronized to serve the *Volk*. For one unified and glorious *Volk*, there could only be one unified and glorious church. The only question left was whether the bishop would be chosen from the German Christians. Almost immediately after the new constitution was approved, the National Synod, the electing body for the Reich Bishop, proposed Friedrich von Bodelschwingh as their candidate. However, the state refused to recognize von Bodelschwingh because he was not a German Christian. They soon forced his resignation through scare tactics.⁵⁰ An election of delegates to

⁴⁷ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 7.

⁴⁸ “New Guiding Principles of the German Christians, 16 May 1933,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 22.

⁴⁹ “Constitution of the German Evangelical Church, 11 July 1933,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 25.

⁵⁰ Herman, *It’s Your Souls We Want*, 127.

the General Synod scheduled for July 23, 1933; if the German Christians won a majority, they could easily install their candidate as bishop. On the eve of this election, the Führer, in an unprecedented intervention in Church affairs, threw his wholehearted support behind the German Christians in a radio broadcast:

The strong state must welcome the chance to lend its support to those religious groupings which...can be useful to it...the ‘German Christians’ [are] determined to do justice to the great tasks of our time...set[ting] [themselves] firmly on the basis of the national socialist state.⁵¹

In the aftermath of this speech, in a voter turnout “two to four times that [of] preceding elections,” Protestants elected a solid majority of German Christians to the General Synod.⁵² In September of 1933, at Wittenberg, this Synod easily elected their candidate, Ludwig Müller, the first and only Reich Bishop of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*.⁵³ This former Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Navy chaplain was ready to make broad, sweeping changes to Protestantism in Germany, having been explicitly backed by the NSDAP and the Führer himself; the German Christians were in a perfect place to implement their vision of a manly, national faith.

Dejudaizing the Reich Church

After gaining control of the Reich Church, German Christians implemented their vision of “dejudaiz[ing] [the] Church and Christianity,” making it the “inescapable and decisive duty of

⁵¹ “Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 28.

⁵² Baranowski, Shelly, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986.

⁵³ Herman, *It's Your Souls We Want*, 128. The election did not receive very much press as most NSDAP officials and normal Germans had turned their attention to the spectacular Harvest Festival taking place at the same time.

the Church.”⁵⁴ Accordingly, they eliminated the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the “Old Testament”) from canonical scriptures, denying its authenticity and capacity to hold any truth whatsoever. Reinhold Krause, a leader of the German Christians in Berlin who was later disgraced and forced to resign for his outlandish statements, demanded “liberation from the Old Testament with its Jewish recompense ethic, from all these stories about cattle-dealers and pimps,” going on to call it “one of the most questionable books in the world’s history.”⁵⁵ This purge of Hebrew Scriptures started in schools, allegedly because “it was an ethically poor example for children; it was unscientific; it had been superseded by the New Testament.”⁵⁶ Interestingly, the first story purged was that of Abraham and Isaac, perhaps because it rejected the concept of human sacrifice, which the NSDAP idealized concerning the state.⁵⁷ Although some scraps of the Psalms did remain in circulation throughout the Third Reich, such preservation was considered to reflect “weakness, defeat, and treachery,” and by 1935, the Hebrew Scriptures were generally forbidden and stricken completely from the German Christian canon.⁵⁸ In order to combat any such remnants, on April 4, 1939, the German Christians founded the Institute for Research into and Elimination of Jewish Influence in German Church Life, which continued to wage war on the influence and remnants of the Old Testament until the fall of the Third Reich in 1945.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 142.

⁵⁵ “The ‘Sports Palace Scandal’, 13 November 1933,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 39.

⁵⁶ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 144.

⁵⁷ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 144. See *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 115: “Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people ‘I offer you a good time.’ Hitler has said to them ‘I offer you struggle, danger, and death [for the nation state,] and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.” – George Orwell

⁵⁸ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 153.

⁵⁹ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 81-82.

Although only the New Testament remained in the German Christian canon, the fight to rid the Church of Jewish influences was far from over; the New Testament itself still had to be purged of Jewish influence. Numerous texts, including accounts of Jesus' Jewish ancestry, his references to earlier Hebrew scripture in the Gospels, and the Apostle Paul's extensive links to Judaism, contradicted the German Christian claim that "Jesus was not a Jew...[and] the essence of the Gospels' message was hatred towards Jews."⁶⁰ German Christians were most satisfied with the Gospel of John, perhaps the most antisemitic of all the canonical gospels. For example, it refers several times to "the Jews" in a negative connotation, and even details Jesus telling "the Jews," "You are of your father, the devil."⁶¹ The Gospel of John, as edited by Bishop Heinz Weidemann, presented Jesus as a fighter against Judaism, "assume[d] Galilee was inhabited by Gentiles,...omit[ted] references to both sin and grace...[and] omitted all named references to Moses and to Hebrew prophets and all Hebrew place names."⁶² Weidemann's version of John "presented Jesus' entire mission as an onslaught against Judaism."⁶³ Similarly, the teachings that Galilee was inhabited by an "Indo-Germanic population" and that Jesus was a "person of Aryan blood from a Viking clan" were pervasive throughout the German Evangelical Church.⁶⁴ Although Weidemann's revisions only covered the Gospel of John, in 1940, Institute for Research into and Elimination of Jewish Influence in German Church Life published *Die Botschaft Gottes (The Message of God)*. This text reshaped the four Gospels into a single

⁶⁰ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 154.

⁶¹ John 8:44. NRSV.

⁶² As quoted in Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 107.

⁶³ As quoted in Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 161.

⁶⁴ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 155.

narrative, and eschewed Matthew, the gospel that portrayed the Jews in the best light.⁶⁵ *Die Botschaft Gottes* essentially refocused Jesus' life on "his triumph rather than [his] defeat through death," and cut from the gospel the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, John the Baptist, the story of the Wise Men, and Jesus' fulfillment of any sort of earlier Hebrew prophecy - although Jesus' knowledge of Judaism was preserved.⁶⁶ *Die Botschaft Gottes* altered familiar phrases and motifs throughout the Gospels, changing the term "kingdom of God" to "God comes to you" and omitting other descriptions of Jesus as compassionate or merciful.⁶⁷ In this version of the gospels, Jesus did not whisper forgiveness to his enemies on the cross.⁶⁸ Christ must be a full embodiment of manliness; he could not be seen as forgiving or merciful.

On the other hand, Paul "represented both pro-Jewish and anti-Jewish potential."⁶⁹ Although scholars agree that Paul without a doubt identified himself as a Jew and possessed extensive knowledge of Jewish law, nevertheless his message to the Gentiles represented a break with Judaism that much of the German Christians' theology hinged on. As a result, they had mixed feelings about the Apostle's writings. For example, Krause believed that the "inferiority-type theology of the Rabbi Paul should be renounced in principle, for it has perpetrated a falsification of the Gospel."⁷⁰ Other theologians concluded that "Paul was a theologian of struggle. He sought to bear the good news of salvation into the world, through the racial chaos,"

⁶⁵ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 106,109. With the exception of Matthew 27:25.

⁶⁶ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 109-110.

⁶⁷ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 110.

⁶⁸ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 163.

⁶⁹ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 157.

⁷⁰ "The 'Sports Palace Scandal,' 13 November 1933," *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 39-40.

and he was a “soul seized by Christ, bound to the chains of a Jewish rabbinical education.”⁷¹ Krause’s opinions emerged as the predominant opinion of the German Christians. To many of them, Paul was not important enough to include in their canon except in brief anti-Jewish excerpts: “Today every German can learn the freedom from the law, for example, from Nietzsche; he does not need a Paul for that, and thereby avoids the danger of being infected by dreaded Jewish-rabbinical doctrines.”⁷² Thus the German Evangelical Church was left with a hodgepodge of canonical texts, strung together to represent Nazi ideologies and reinforce Aryan racial superiority and hatred of Jews. After all was said and done the New Testament was used primarily to call “the troops of Christ against the [Jews].”⁷³

As the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* made these canonical changes, it also turned its attention to altering Christian worship “in keeping with Nazi racism, militarism, and hyper-masculinity.”⁷⁴ Prayer in particular posed problems because of the supplication involved – which was seen as the antithesis of the manly soldier that symbolize the NSDAP and its aims. Also up for debate was the question of for whom or what one should pray.⁷⁵ Were prayers for peace acceptable in a war-driven Third Reich? Should one pray for one’s enemies, those outside the *Volk*? This situation was never fully resolved, but, generally, German Christians liked to frame their prayers as praise instead of repentance and supplication. Positive Christians also had to deal with the issue of hymns and church music. Would references to the Old Testament be kept, and would psalms still be sung? Krause, a recurring figure in these discussions, made it clear, in

⁷¹ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 157-158.

⁷² Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 158.

⁷³ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 160.

⁷⁴ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 113.

⁷⁵ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 114.

1933, that the church “want[ed] to sing songs that are free from all Israelite elements,” also expressing a desire to “turn to our German mother tongue.”⁷⁶ However, in 1934, Bishop Müller was still encouraging the singing of hymns with references to the Old Testament, even using Hallelujah instead of “Hail to Our God.”⁷⁷ By late 1935, German Christians were “agitating against Hebraisms in church music, which included Hebrew words and Jewish composers, [and] even ranted against Gregorian Chants as influenced by Hebrew melodies.”⁷⁸ From 1935-1944 several revised hymnals, featuring antisemitism, struggle, work, and the fatherland as the ultimate virtues, were published, but attachment to familiar hymns kept any one hymnal from being used on the national level.⁷⁹ In this instance, the German Christians were relatively unsuccessful.

Although the German Christians could not completely alter church music in the German Evangelical Church, they had much more success applying the Aryan Paragraph, a law demanding civil servants to be free from Jewish blood, to the clergy and congregants of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. The reasoning was that, since “the church had always established some requirements...for its officials...there was no reason why it could not add other requirements,” namely, race.⁸⁰ In 1933, during the General Synod previously mentioned, the German Christians attempted to insert the Aryan Paragraph into their church’s constitution, but

⁷⁶ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 165.

⁷⁷ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 165, 167.

⁷⁸ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 115.

⁷⁹ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 115-116.

⁸⁰ Helmreich, Ernst Christian, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979, 146.

the non-German Christians temporarily blocked the action by walking out of the Synod.⁸¹

Struggle to implement the Aryan Paragraph continued, and by 1938 its de facto implementation was a reality.⁸² Candidates for ordination, along with their wives or prospective wives, were forced to present proof of Aryan descent.⁸³ Likewise, both non-Aryan pastors and Aryan pastors with non-Aryan wives were forced to leave the ministry, in order “uphold the *völkisch* state.”⁸⁴

Such restrictions did not end with the clergy. As the war progressed, the German Christians grew more rabid and exclusionary towards non-Aryan congregants. Their practices culminated on December 17, 1941, when the German Christians issued a decree excluding non-Aryans from congregations: “Jewish Christians are to be excluded from religious congregations as enemies of the Reich; German pastors may not extend their official services to Jewish Christians; church taxes may not be collected from Jewish Christians.”⁸⁵ These non-Aryan Christians were considered racially Jewish either because they were recent converts to Christianity or because they had only been Christians for one or two generations.⁸⁶ While the final solution to the Jewish problem was just beginning to take shape in 1941, the ecclesiastical final solution was being implemented effectively by the German Christians. The day was theirs, and the church was too.

⁸¹ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 164.

⁸² Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 90.

⁸³ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 91.

⁸⁴ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 83, 92-95.

⁸⁵ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 140.

⁸⁶ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 97.

Rebuilding Protestantism in Germany After World War II

When the Nazi regime fell in 1945, the Protestant church in Germany was “forced to prove the church’s value to a defeated and disillusioned populace... [and] to achieve credibility in the eyes of occupying authorities.”⁸⁷ The attempt to please one group, either the majority of the German people or the conquering governments, generally resulted in anger from the other party. As a result, the Protestant leadership was forced to walk a tightrope, attempting to please parties that represented different aims and goals. In order to please the governing authorities, the Protestant churches nominally purged the church of German Christian ideas and church officials. There were complaints that this nominal purge was a mere “political alibi,” meant to pacify the governing authorities without angering the masses, not even going so far as to question NSDAP membership and participation.⁸⁸ It is clear that the actions taken were relatively lax, for, by 1949, almost all the former German Christian clergy were either acting as clergy within the Protestant church or were in the process of reentering church service.⁸⁹ The decision to allow German Christian clergy and laity to remain within the church also meant that German Christian ideas remained in the church for years to come. For instance, Eleanor Liebe-Harkfort, a former German Christian, in 1956, said, “I still believe...that everything would have turned out differently if the *Volk* had truly stood by the Führer... In our hearts, are we any freer today? Are we today a Christian people?”⁹⁰ For those who still sympathized with the German Christian movement, there was still a question of what could have happened during the Third Reich and even what could happen if the church re-embraced the Aryan church. Even former German

⁸⁷ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 207-208.

⁸⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 220.

⁸⁹ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 212.

⁹⁰ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 206.

Christians who were genuinely disillusioned with the NSDAP tended to remain fiercely nationalistic and patriotic, being opposed to reconciliation with the West and any political or spiritual confession of guilt.

After dealing with the reintegration of German Christians into the church, Protestant leaders turned themselves to reorganizing their church on a national level. In June of 1948, after many years of discussion and provisional leadership, the Protestants settled on the name, Evangelical Church in Germany, which would be a “confederation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches,” honoring the “confessional basis of member churches” and promising not to disturb member churches in “ doctrine, church life, and administration.”⁹¹ In essence, the Evangelical Church in Germany operated on a confederation model, not interfering in local church affairs and confining itself to the realm of suggestion. It saw its primary mission as coordinating church unity and representing the Protestants of Germany in foreign affairs. Protestantism was once again offering a stable environment for the people of Germany to turn to in their efforts to rebuild their nation.

Nothing caused more division among church leaders in 1945 than the debates about whether the Evangelical Church in Germany should assume guilt for the rise of the NSDAP and the atrocities it committed. During the first years after the fall of the Third Reich, German Protestant leaders sought to improve their image in the international community by painting themselves in the role of the victim while emphasizing the constant resistance of the Confessing Church - through such well-known figures as Niemöller and Bonhoeffer – to the policies and travesties of the NSDAP. Yet they consistently refused to address “the theological, political, and

⁹¹ Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler*, 423.

ecclesiastical reasons as to why large sections of the church had identified comfortably with the Nazis.”⁹²

In this context there was a push, headed by the now-famous Niemöller, to admit corporate guilt in order to assure that the same mistakes would never be made again.⁹³ The first attempt at such a confession, “A Message to the Congregations,” tried to accommodate those who denied the necessity for such a confession by speaking in generalities and by using the passive voice.⁹⁴ In a second attempt, on October 19, 1945, the Protestant church adopted the “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt.” This document was a much more direct confession, recognizing that the church is “in a great solidarity of guilt”: “We now declare in the name of the whole Church... we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.”⁹⁵ Importantly, however, church officials did not see this confession of guilt as extending into the political realm. To do so, for the German public, would be a second Versailles, another betrayal of Germany, and an admission that the blame for the ashes and rubble left throughout Europe rested squarely on the shoulders of Germany, something most Germans were unwilling to bear.⁹⁶

Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that “all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such

⁹² Hockenos, Matthew D. *A Church Divided*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, 49.

⁹³ Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 64.

⁹⁴ Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, Appendix 3.

⁹⁵ Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, Appendix 4.

⁹⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 210-211.

oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.”⁹⁷ In the rubble left in the wake of World War II, a large portion of Germans constructed a narrative in which they were the ultimate victims, first of Hitler and his ideologies and second of the Allied occupation. In this narrative, admitting guilt was completely unacceptable.⁹⁸ Accordingly, many of those who signed the “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” asked that it not be published or simply failed to mention it in diocesan reports, thus reflecting Anderson’s “characteristic popular amnesia.”⁹⁹

Nevertheless, regardless of the German people’s supposed victim status, at the international level, the concepts captured in the “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” came to characterize the German experience after World War II. Niemöller put it this way: “The guilt exists, there is no doubt about it. Even if there were no other guilt than that of the six million clay urns, containing the ashes of burnt Jews from all over Europe.”¹⁰⁰ A stifling guilt, guilt with no end, pervaded post-war Germany, and there was no relief to be found, except perhaps in the amnesia of victimhood, which is, in fact, no relief at all.

But how did Germans handle such guilt within the church? Some answered the question easily, finding it “easier to break entirely with [the church] than to attempt to reconstruct [it].”¹⁰¹ Others, seeing the declaration of guilt as a treachery to the German people, refused to serve a church that had turned its back on Germany, capitulating and groveling to the Allies.¹⁰² Some even went so far as to deny the reality of the Holocaust and to downplay supposed tragedies

⁹⁷ Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 1983, 204.

⁹⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*. 210.

⁹⁹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 210-211.

¹⁰⁰ Niemöller, Martin, *Of Guilt and Hope*, New York; Philosophical Society Incorporated, 1947.

¹⁰¹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 239.

¹⁰² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 211.

during the Third Reich; the pain of knowing the truth was perhaps just too much to handle.¹⁰³ Others channeled their guilt into rebuilding the church, seeing the Third Reich as a terrible interruption and distortion, but an event from which there could be measurable recovery.¹⁰⁴ After the Evangelical Church in Germany was willing to give a voice to the guilt of the German people and to the Protestant church, there were mixed responses, but there was hope for the future, something the Protestants in Germany had not had for an age.

Concluding Remarks

The use of race in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* represents a definitive break from the earlier tradition of Christian anti-Judaism that is analyzed in the next chapter. This is most clearly seen in a discussion of baptism. When Reich Church theologians contended, “baptism never made a Jew into a German,” they were necessarily presupposing that a church was to be both national and racially pure.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, at a fundamental level, this statement indicates that the German Christian movement perceived the Jews to be a separate race. As such, German Christian policies differed from traditional, Christian anti-Judaism in the sense that Christian anti-Judaism opposed the Jews on the grounds of their religion. Where traditional anti-Judaism would welcome the baptism and conversion of the Jews, the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* declared true conversion of the Jews to be impossible, even implementing the removal of converted Jews from congregations in 1941.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 221.

¹⁰⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 240.

¹⁰⁵ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 140.

While the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* had a high degree of divergence from Christian anti-Judaism regarding the issues of nationalism and race, it also demonstrated a high degree of continuity with the preexisting tradition of Christian anti-Judaism. For instance, German Christians used supersessionist arguments present in Christian anti-Judaism since the first and second centuries to argue for the complete elimination of the Old Testament from canonical scripture.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, they deployed standard anti-Jewish rhetoric as found in John 8:44 and Matthew 27:55 to their advantage when constructing their new Gospel, taking very seriously the claims that these works contain, namely that the father of the Jews was the devil and that the Jews had willingly taken upon themselves bloodguilt of the crucifixion of Christ. To the extent to which they utilize anti-Judaism in scripture and liturgy and utilized the writings of Martin Luther, a figure to be discussed at length in chapter three, they were recapitulating traditional anti-Judaism.

Niemöller's reflections on the guilt incurred by German Protestantism when it accepted the syncretism between Nazi ideology and Christian tradition represent the development of alternative legacies in opposition to the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism. Black and white representations of Christianity's role in the Third Reich will not suffice, and, as we will see in the following chapters, there is also a positive legacy of Christian tradition that develops out of this conflict in response and opposition to Christian anti-Judaism. Those participating in a battle for hegemony over Christian tradition and orthodoxy draw on both legacies.

As the preliminary stories at the beginning of the chapter indicate, the question of the use of antisemitism and anti-Judaism in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* is complex, representing points of both continuity and divergence. Having at our disposal the details of the German Christian movement makes the subsequent analysis of its continuities with and divergences from

¹⁰⁷ Bergen, *The Twisted Cross*, 144.

Christian anti-Judaism both easier and more difficult, easier because we have more tools at our disposal, and more difficult because the further we dive into this legacy, the more complex it becomes. With this in mind, chapter two addresses Christian anti-Judaism in detail.

Chapter 2: Anti-Judaism in Early Christian Texts and the Writings of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine

This chapter is primarily an attempt to trace selectively the development of Christian anti-Judaism by analyzing the writings of early Christian communities, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine. While the constraints of this paper force one to be selective in choosing who in the wide breadth of history will be discussed, the authors and their texts that appear below are important precisely because they are representative of the development Christian anti-Judaism underwent from Late Antiquity until the Middle Ages. I must stress the selectivity of this narrative. Every development in Christian anti-Judaism is not discussed, but the key components and rhetoric that arose in these centuries is covered sufficiently. Needless to say, a large number of German Christians were not reading Chrysostom's *Adversus Judaeos* homilies, but they certainly read the canonical gospels, an important battleground of Christian-Jewish relations. By tracing the development of Christian anti-Judaism, one is better equipped to ask questions concerning the continuities and divergences from Christian anti-Judaism that are present in the liturgy, worship, and action of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. In this sense, this chapter and the previous one provide a baseline from which the arguments of this thesis flow and said arguments will, to a certain degree, presuppose a discussion of these key, representative figures in the development of Christian anti-Judaism.

Identity Formation

“We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”¹⁰⁸ Appearing in the Gospel of John, this patent self-identification drips off the lips of none other than Jesus himself. Yet in the very same Gospel, “the Jews”¹⁰⁹ are decried as children of the Devil.¹¹⁰ In Matthew’s Gospel, “the Jews” even willingly take on the guilt of deicide: “Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”¹¹¹ Still more radical, the early second-century *Epistle of Barnabas*, a non-canonical work, implores Christians “not to liken [themselves] to certain persons who pile up sin upon sin, saying that our covenant remains to [the Jews] also.”¹¹² Instead, the *Epistle of Barnabas* argues that the Jews lost their covenant with God for their faithlessness as soon as they received it at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

Since the Christians claimed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises made in the Tanakh, unconvinced Jews who denied that Jesus was the Christ presented a grave threat to the success of the Christian movement by refusing to accept Jesus. For, so long as they existed, pagan detractors could point to the Jews to disprove Christian claims of supersession and fulfillment. Adding to the problem was the fact that “Christianity was not notably successful in converting Jews to its message.”¹¹³ In this environment, anti-Jewish rhetoric emerged in the first century after Christianity’s founding as a tool for Christian leaders and communities, which had their beginnings as a sect of Judaism. It contested the Jewish status

¹⁰⁸ John 4:22, NRSV.

¹⁰⁹ For an academic discussion of the use of “the Jews” in John’s Gospel see: Ehrman, Bart, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings*, Oxford, OUP, 2000, 144.

¹¹⁰ John 8:44, NRSV.

¹¹¹ Matthew 27:25, NRSV.

¹¹² *Epistle of Barnabas*, trans. by J.B. Lightfoot, 4.6, Early Christian Writings Online.

¹¹³ Segal, Alan F. *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, Cambridge, HUP, 1986, 95.

as the people of God and established a place for Christian communities separate from Judaism, all the while claiming the Jews' chosen status and antiquity, an important religious currency in Late Antiquity, as their own.¹¹⁴ This rhetoric became ossified in the canonical texts that Christian communities used as the foundation of their faith and, as such, exercised a high degree of influence in later Christian traditions.

Christian leaders in subsequent centuries, including German Christians, would read the words of the crowd in Matthew in new contexts and apply anti-Jewish rhetoric to their current situations. By this time, however, the tables had turned; the Christians in subsequent centuries were hegemonic and the Jews were a minority religion with increasingly diminished power. In many ways, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is the very essence of sibling rivalry, the drama of the biblical story of Jacob and Esau played out in the form of religious systems. In this case as in the biblical narrative, the elder brother is left with only a lamentation: "Do you only have one blessing, my father?" and tears, while the younger brother exercises dominion over him, all the while affirming that there is indeed only one blessing for the father to give.¹¹⁵

Christian leaders came to decry the synagogue as "a brothel and a theater," "a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts," and "the dwelling of demons,"¹¹⁶ while Jews are said to

¹¹⁴ Wilson, Stephen G., *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 C.E.*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 296. Wilson states that Christians were motivated by "a need to express their own sense of identity, distinct from Jews," "to locate themselves in the grand sweep of salvation history," and the desire to obtain "the ancient heritage" of the Jews.

¹¹⁵ Genesis 27:38, NRSV. This rhetoric is also utilized by Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews," trans. by Thelwall, Early Christian Writings Online, II.2: "ascend we unto the mount of the Lord, and unto the house of the God of Jacob,"--not of Esau, the former son, but of Jacob, the second; that is, of our "people," whose "mount" is Christ."

¹¹⁶ Chrysostom, John, *Adversus Judaeos 1.3.1*, trans. Paul W. Harkins.

have “demons dwell[ing] in their souls.”¹¹⁷ The first part of this chapter will discuss robust personalities of two Doctors of the Church from the fourth and fifth centuries CE. St. Ambrose, the exceedingly powerful and history-shaping bishop of Milan, and St. John Chrysostom, the renowned Archbishop of Constantinople. These two theologians are touchstones for the use of anti-Judaism in Late Antiquity as a method of constructing Christian self-identity. Importantly, they represent a high degree of continuity with the tradition of anti-Judaism evident in early Christian texts from the first and second centuries C.E. They are also important because of the degree to which they are revered in the Christian tradition. Not only are they both saints, but they are also two of only thirty-three recognized Doctors of the Church in Roman Catholicism, a fact that both gives force to their rhetoric and represents the extent to which their rhetoric was accepted by religious authorities of both their time and later centuries.

In their minds, anti-Judaism was, at the very least, permissible and at the worst, laudable. To these Church Fathers, being Christian was to be against Judaism, for Judaism was the foil against which orthodoxy was presented, diametrically opposed and yet born out of the same bosom. From St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom’s perspective, a tangible spiritual danger resulted from Christians and Jews “mix[ing] what cannot be mixed” and this is what spawned their polemics against the Jews.¹¹⁸ The birthright and blessing that God originally gave to the Jews was given to Jesus and the Christians, and God has no other blessing to give. From Ambrose Chrysostom’s point of view, Christianity supersedes and fulfills Judaism, and even if He had another blessing to give, why should He? For the principal crime of the Jews in these theologian’s eyes is that of deicide; the Jews killed God’s one and only Son, the second person in the Trinity, the very God of very God. There can be no redemption for these forsaken people

¹¹⁷ Chrysostom, John, *Adversus Judaeos* 1.6.7, trans. Paul W. Harkins.

¹¹⁸ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, IV.3.6.

outside of a visceral severing of identity, a forsaking of the religion of their fathers.

In the second part of this chapter, we will discuss Augustine's view of the Jews, which present a new framework in which to consider Jewish-Christian relations. Instead of employing anti-Jewish rhetoric to make room for Christian communities, Augustine conferred upon the Jews a key place in the Christian soteriology. Jews are to act as a witness people, testifying to the validity of the prophecies before Christ, and, as such, their existence as Jews was sacrosanct.¹¹⁹ Instead of merely existing to hinder the Christian claims of truth, Jews had a place, but it was not one of equality. The Jews were still to serve the Christians, and thus exist as a lesser people, barely granted theological justification for their very existence. This conception of Jews, that they were permitted to survive at the pleasure of the Christians and, thus, could never thrive, created a tenuous balance between acceptance and rejection, a balance that far too often tilted in favor of rejection. Even when Christians such as Augustine provided a theological place of refuge for the Jews, they still recapitulated hegemonic, Christian anti-Judaism and thus represented continuity with the Gospels, St. Ambrose, and St. John Chrysostom. This is an important realization, since the purpose of this chapter is to trace Christian anti-Judaism through the centuries as a precursor and foundation to the later race-based expressions of antisemitism promulgated by the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46, 827-828. Trans. by Henry Bettenson

Anti-Judaism and Christian Identity in the Works of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan

In 388 the destruction of the synagogue and the razing of the Valentinian Grove¹²⁰ at Callinicum pitted two of the most powerful men on earth against each other, the emperor Theodosius I and Ambrose, bishop of Milan. According to Paulinus of Milan, “a synagogue of the Jews and a grove sacred to the Valentinians were burned down by Christian men because the Jews and the Valentinians had reviled some Christian monks.”¹²¹ However, it seems more likely that the crowd acted at the “instigation of their bishop,” having been “provoked by an interruption of their procession on the 1st of August, when they were celebrating the Festival of the Maccabees.”¹²² This depiction of devastation of non-Christian holy sites fits with other works from the time period. Libanius detailed how “the black-robed tribe [monks]...hasten to attack the temples with sticks and stones and bars of iron...utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demolition of walls, the tearing of statues and the overthrow of altars....the priests must either keep quiet or die.”¹²³ When Ambrose heard of the situation, he was in Aquileia in order to oversee the funeral of the bishop there and consecrate his successor.¹²⁴ He learned that the emperor had “ordered the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop (at his expense) of the place and that the monks be punished.”¹²⁵

Ambrose soon fired off a letter to Milan, where the emperor resided, which urged him to rescind his previous order. Ambrose lambasted the decision of the emperor, declaring that if the

¹²⁰ In one of Ambrose’s letters he says that a temple, *fanum*, was razed, not a Grove, *lucus*, as is recorded in Paulinus of Milan’s *The Life of Saint Ambrose*.

¹²¹ Paulinus of Milan, *The Life of Saint Ambrose*, trans. Ramsey, 22.

¹²² Dudden, Homes, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935, 372.

¹²³ Libanius, “Pro Templis,” Trans. A. F. Norman, *Selected Works* vol. 2, 92-151.

¹²⁴ Dudden, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, 371.

¹²⁵ Paulinus of Milan, *The Life of Saint Ambrose*, 204-205.

bishop of Callinicum were to do what the emperor asked, the bishop would become an apostate: “Are you not afraid that he will comply with your judgment? Does it not worry you that he may become an apostate?”¹²⁶ After all, the “Church has shut out the synagogue,”¹²⁷ because the Jews have shut out Christ, “whom they killed, whom they rejected.”¹²⁸ Ambrose made it clear that “it is a serious matter to put your [Theodosius’] faith at risk for the sake of the Jews,”¹²⁹ and to rebuild a synagogue, giving “the Jews this triumph over the Church of God,”¹³⁰ would be to side with the enemies of Christ, forfeiting the emperor’s salvation. Perhaps the most devastating option was that he would “speak out;” either way, the bishop will become “either an apostate or a martyr,” each alternative being “alien to the spirit” of Theodosius’ reign.¹³¹ Indeed, the bishop hinted that he would actively seek out his own martyrdom, saying “that he himself raised the fire, assembled the crowds, and led the people, so as not to lose the opportunity for martyrdom.”¹³² Incidentally, this was Ambrose’s plan as well: “I declare that I burnt the synagogue, or at any rate that I instructed them that there should be no building where Christ was denied.”¹³³ Clearly, Ambrose was unafraid of martyrdom, for he is “declar[ing] the cause of God,”¹³⁴ a God who only has one blessing to give.

¹²⁶ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” trans. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan: Political Speeches and Letters*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005, 6. All following quotes from Ambrose come from this work.

¹²⁷ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 24.

¹²⁸ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 26.

¹²⁹ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 26.

¹³⁰ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 20.

¹³¹ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 7.

¹³² Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 8.

¹³³ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 8.

¹³⁴ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 5.

As a result of his letter, Theodosius rescinded his request that the bishop himself pay for the rebuilding of the synagogue. Instead, the state or city was to assume the cost for the project.¹³⁵ While this was a deft and somewhat acceptable compromise, Ambrose still protested and carried out his threat of being heard in church. The next opportunity Ambrose had, when Theodosius I was in attendance at the Milan Cathedral, he delivered a scathing sermon in which he addressed the emperor through God's conversation with David: "Will you brand yourself with sin, and give a triumph to my adversaries?"¹³⁶ Ambrose insisted that the investigation be closed and that no Christian would be punished. Then he did something astounding; he refused to offer the Eucharist until Theodosius promised to give him what he asked for.¹³⁷ In the presence of sympathizing laity and a stern bishop who would doubtless make good his threats, Theodosius relented and Ambrose went back to the altar to offer the divine mysteries, sensing that "it had been particularly agreeable to our God."¹³⁸ In this case, the series of events that were declared "agreeable" to God left the Jews with nothing but the ashes of their synagogue.

And so, through the burning of the synagogue at Callinicum, Ambrose's use of anti-Judaism in order to construct a Christian identity became clear. There was a manifest dichotomy at work. In this way, the Christians are pitted against the Jews, "that perfidious people,"¹³⁹ who occupy a synagogue, "a worthless building...a house of impiety, a refuge of madness, which

¹³⁵ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 35.

¹³⁶ Ambrose of Milan, "Epistula Extra Collectionem 1: To Ambrose's Sister Marcellina," 25.

¹³⁷ Paulinus of Milan, *The Life of Saint Ambrose*, 23.

¹³⁸ Ambrose of Milan, "Epistula Extra Collectionem 1," 28.

¹³⁹ Ambrose of Milan, "Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius," 10.

God himself has condemned.”¹⁴⁰ According to Ambrose, God was deaf to the pleas of the people with whom he previously had a sacred covenant: “God does not allow himself to be petitioned on behalf of those who think they should be defended [the Jews].”¹⁴¹ Christianity was only orthodox to Ambrose to the extent that it battled Judaism and the crucifiers of Jesus. Arguably the most evident construction of Christian social identity based on anti-Judaism was the charge of apostasy for rebuilding the synagogue, an action bringing “celebration to the synagogue...[and] grief to the church.”¹⁴² The bishop who was ordered to rebuild the synagogue was left with a choice “between apostasy and martyrdom.”¹⁴³ There could be no peaceful coexistence between Judaism and Christianity, for, in Ambrose’s view, any tiny privilege given to the synagogue must be taken from the treasury of the church. God had spoken and the verdict had fallen against the Jews. In Ambrose’s rhetoric, one cannot support or defend Judaism without jeopardizing one’s identification with Christianity; anti-Judaism was Christian orthodoxy.

Anti-Judaism and Christian Identity in the Works of John Chrysostom

While a presbyter in Antioch, John Chrysostom delivered a series of discourses called *Adversus Judaeos*,¹⁴⁴ According to Paul W. Harkins, the targets of these discourses were not Jews themselves but “members of his own congregation who continued to observe Jewish feasts and fasts.”¹⁴⁵ As a syncretic movement, the Judaizers had powerful pull in Antioch and evidently

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 13, 14.

¹⁴¹ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 14.

¹⁴² Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 1.

¹⁴³ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistula 74: To the Emperor Theodosius,” 7.

¹⁴⁴ This title is itself a translation of the Greek *Kata Ioudaion*.

¹⁴⁵ Harkins, Paul W, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 68, *Saint John Chrysostom*, X.

warranted Chrysostom's attention to the extent that eight different discourses were delivered over the course of 386-387 CE. They were evidently "sizeable and...socially influential," celebrating their festivals and feasts publicly, while welcoming others.¹⁴⁶ Many Christians were evidently were, willingly and unwillingly, in contact with such a community; Chrysostom records the story of a man dragging a woman before a synagogue tribunal because "oaths sworn there were more to be feared."¹⁴⁷ The Juadaizers considered the synagogue a "holy place," seeking out cures from renowned rabbi healers.¹⁴⁸ By delivering a series of sermons denigrating the Jews and declaring their covenant with God broken by virtue of their deicide, Chrysostom made a sharp distinction between Judaism and Christianity, eliminating the possibility of existing in both religious communities and delineating precisely what it means to be Christian in his locality, Antioch. His *Adversus Judaeos* homilies should be read in a context that recognizes how Chrysostom's homilies were meant to engage his congregation "in the ongoing religious and political competition to control *fourth-century* Antioch, its places, and the religious 'orthodoxy' of its citizens."¹⁴⁹ Chrysostom's anti-Jewish rhetoric was part of a broader effort to enforce and shape Nicene orthodoxy in Antioch. Even so, in utilizing anti-Jewish rhetoric in pursuit of his pro-Nicene stance, Chrysostom was an important figure in the development of Christian anti-Judaism, for here we see a Christian leader actively working against a Jewish community in direct contact with his churches in Antioch.

¹⁴⁶ Kelly, J.N.D., *Golden Mouth*, Trowbridge: Redwood Books, 1995, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. Paul Harkins, I.3.4.

¹⁴⁸ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. Paul Harkins, I.5.2.

¹⁴⁹ Shepardson, Christine, "Controlling Contested Places: John Chrysostom's *Adversus Iudaeos* Homilies and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 15:4, 2007, 498.

Throughout his discourses, Chrysostom made three things clear: the Jews' principal crime is that of deicide, God has forsaken them and transferred their status to the church, and the Jews and their gathering places are demonic. These claims were linked inseparably in Chrysostom's argument and maintained throughout these discourses. He began in Discourse I by proclaiming that "the morning Sun of Justice arose for them, but they thrust aside its rays and still sit in darkness...they crucified him whom the prophets had foretold."¹⁵⁰ Later in Discourse I, Chrysostom claimed that the Judaizers shared feasts and fasts "with those who shouted: 'Crucify him, Crucify him!'"¹⁵¹ Notice Chrysostom's tactic: he ascribed the guilt of crucifixion not just to those Jews who were actually complicit in the event, but their descendents as well. He advanced a charge of generational bloodguilt, taking seriously Matthew 27:25.¹⁵² To Chrysostom, the guilt of the crucifixion fell not just on the Jews of the first century CE, but also on all Jews. For their guilt was not just in the crucifixion of a mere man, but of God himself.¹⁵³ Chrysostom drove home this point in arguably his most biting rhetorical charge of deicide:

The difference between the Jews and us is not a small one...Is there a dispute between us over ordinary, everyday matters so that you think the two religions are really one and the same? They crucified the Christ whom you adore as God...How is it that you keep running to those who slew Christ when you say that you worship him whom they crucified?¹⁵⁴

"Why are you mixing what cannot be mixed," Chrysostom pointedly asked.¹⁵⁵ How could one have fellowship with those who are so opposed to the Christian way of life as to murder Christ,

¹⁵⁰ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.2.1.

¹⁵¹ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.5.1.

¹⁵² "His blood be upon us and our Children."

¹⁵³ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.5.1.

¹⁵⁴ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, IV.3.6.

¹⁵⁵ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, IV.3.6.

God incarnate, the very God of the very God? In this way, Chrysostom produced a distinct, concrete boundary between the two communities, one orthodox, the other demonic.

Having accused the Jews of deicide, Chrysostom then went on to claim that, because of their crime, the Jews had forfeited their claims of a singular relationship with God, causing God to turn his back on them and grant their former status to the Church. Chrysostom put it like this: “You Jews broke the yoke, you burst the bonds, you cast yourselves out of the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵⁶ He further characterized the Jews as “those people who never failed to attack their own salvation.”¹⁵⁷ Because of their crimes, “God clearly and completely turn[ed] himself from [them]...abandoning [them] forever.”¹⁵⁸ Co-opting the Jewish identity as a people consecrated unto God, Chrysostom transferred their status to the church:

Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, they fell to kinship with dogs, we who were dogs received the strength, through God’s grace, to put aside irrational nature which was ours and to rise to the honor of sons...They became dogs, and we became the children.¹⁵⁹

To Chrysostom, God’s covenant with the Jews had been annulled; they had been cast from their father’s house. The Jews, guilty of deicide, were left with nothing, while, in Chrysostom’s theology, the mostly Gentile church becomes the beneficiary and partner in God’s new covenant. Again we see the idea that God, like Isaac, has only one blessing to impart and that the elder son has forfeited his birthright while the younger son receives all his father’s inheritance. For Chrysostom, “God’s rejection [of the Jews] is complete.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.2.4.

¹⁵⁷ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.2.3.

¹⁵⁸ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, VI.3.5.

¹⁵⁹ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.2.1-I.2.2.

¹⁶⁰ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.7.4.

Not content to merely strip the Jews of their birthright, Chrysostom continued to demonstrate his rhetorical prowess through his characterizations of Jews as demonic. With fervor Chrysostom asked his listeners to remember that, because of their betrayal of Christ, “demons dwell in [Jews’] souls” and that “these demons are more dangerous than the ones of old.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, Chrysostom maintained that any place where Jews gathered was inhabited by demons: “Even if there is no idol there, still demons do inhabit the place.”¹⁶² In this demonic synagogue, “the Jews practice a deceit which is more dangerous...[sacrificing on] an invisible altar of deceit...not sheep and calves but the souls of men.”¹⁶³ Their betrayal of Christ was so unforgivably horrific that the Jews are turned from men to beasts, from God’s chosen people to the enemies of God and the servants of the devil. After portraying the Jews as the enemies of God, Chrysostom naturally turned to Christ’s actions taken against the Jews:

You Jews did crucify him. But after he died on the cross, he destroyed your city; it was then that he dispersed your people; it was then that he scattered your nation over the face of the earth. In doing this, he teaches us that he is risen, alive, and in heaven.¹⁶⁴

To Chrysostom, Christ’s direct opposition to the Jewish people, his destruction of their holy places and his rejection of their covenant, proved His resurrection. The Jews “deserve countless evils”¹⁶⁵ and, in Chrysostom’s world, Christ and his agents were to administer the judgment the Jews so rightfully deserve.

Chrysostom used Christ’s judgment upon the Jews as a potent rhetorical symbol to create distance between his orthodox community and others. In Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish rhetoric,

¹⁶¹ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.6.7.

¹⁶² Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.6.2.

¹⁶³ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, I.6.4.

¹⁶⁴ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, V.1.7.

¹⁶⁵ Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. by Harkins, VI.3.4.

being a true Christian necessarily involved opposition to the Jews, the Christ-killers, those who nailed the Christian God to a cross. Moreover, God was unable and unwilling to keep covenant with those guilty of deicide in the same way Christians should be unable and unwilling to be in contact with Jews. Chrysostom's call to action then, in the form of his discourses, constructed a vision of Christianity based on its opposition to Judaism. Anti-Judaism, in short, was Chrysostom's antidote to the "disease" of the Judaizers, those who would dare to say that there was no or negligible difference between Judaism and Christianity. He emphasized the vast differences between the religions through his anti-Jewish rhetoric, effectively constructing a boundary for his religious community.

Survive But Never Thrive

Although Ambrose of Milan and Chrysostom form a formidable pair of Patristic authors, one must include St. Augustine in their company in both writings and contribution to the topic of Christian-Jewish relations. St. Augustine, another doctor of the church baptized by none other than St. Ambrose himself, made innumerable contributions to western thought, including the concepts of original sin, just war, and salvation through divine grace. His thought profoundly influenced and directed the Medieval worldview; key figures such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin would come to claim him as their chief influence. While these positions may be what Augustine is, quite deservedly, known for, his divergence from the rabid, hateful anti-Judaism of his predecessors presented Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages with a new framework for understanding the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. When detractors, such as Julian the Apostate, used the continued existence of Judaism to oppose

Christianity's universal claims of truth,¹⁶⁶ theologians came to regard Judaism's very existence as unwarranted and unneeded; the sibling rivalry had changed now that the younger brother held a position of authority over the elder.

Augustine confronted these ideas head-on, rejecting them as un-Christian and putting forth his own version of orthodoxy through his thoughts on the Jews. With his rhetoric, Augustine crafted an important place for the Jewish people within Christian soteriology. The Jews were to serve as an unwilling witness to the truth and fulfillment of prophecy through Jesus, a truth and fulfillment they are blind to:

They were dispersed all over the world – for indeed there is no part of the earth where they are not found – and thus by evidence of their own Scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ...It follows that when Jews do not believe in our Scriptures, their own Scriptures are fulfilled in them, while they read them with blind eyes...In spite of themselves, they supply for our benefit by their possession and preservation of those books, that they themselves are dispersed among all nations, in whatever direction the Church spreads...For if they lived with that testimony of the Scriptures only in their own land, and not everywhere, the obvious result would be that the Church, which is everywhere, would not have them available among all nations as witnesses to the prophecies which were given beforehand.¹⁶⁷

Having ascribed to them such a prominent, important place in Christianity, Augustine went on to protect them physically: “It [God’s protection of the Jews] comes in this passage, ‘As for my God, his mercy will go before me; my God has shown me this in the case of my enemies. Do not slay them, lest at some time they forget your law.’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book V. As found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II. Vol. 2. Ed. Philip Schaff et. al: “Though the emperor hated and oppressed the Christians, he manifested benevolence and humanity towards the Jews. He wrote to the Jewish patriarchs and leaders, as well as to the people, requesting them to pray for him, and for the prosperity of the empire. In taking this step he was not actuated, I am convinced, by any respect for their religion; for he was aware that it is, so to speak, the mother of the Christian religion, and he knew that both religions rest upon the authority of the [biblical] patriarchs and the prophets; but he thought to grieve the Christians by favoring the Jews, who are their most inveterate enemies.”

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46, 827-828. Trans. by Henry Bettenson.

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46, 828. Trans. by Henry Bettenson

“Do not slay them!” As simple as it may seem, these words were revolutionary in their mercy. Augustine crafted a place for Jews to exist in a Christian empire, as Jews, because without them God’s plan for salvation is stymied. They were to maintain their adherence to the Law and therefore contribute to the salvation narrative of Christianity as they bore witness through their scriptures to both the antiquity of Christianity and the prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ. Paula Fredriksen maintains that Augustine envisioned the Jews’ “continuing ‘fleshly’ allegiance to their law” as a sort of sacrament, protecting “them from the duress of religious coercion.”¹⁶⁹ As Fredriksen summarizes, “Jews, alone of all the religious minorities within the (newly) Christian state, should be unimpeded in their religious practice...God himself wanted the Jews to remain Jews...Let them preserve their ancient books...Let them live openly according to their ancestral practices while scattered among the Christian majority.”¹⁷⁰ Augustine even took into account the diaspora, which many Church Fathers reasoned was the clearest sign of God’s abandonment of the Jewish people, turning it into one of the duties God has assigned to the Jews. The Jews could only serve as an effective witness if they are spread to all regions of the earth.

However, one must not overstate the tolerance in Augustine’s schema. Although Augustine’s thought was new, fresh, and ascribed a place for the Jews in Christian society, their place was not one of equality; Christendom was unprepared for a pluralistic dialogue. Accordingly, Augustine made sure to subordinate the Jewish covenant to the new covenant of Christ; the Jews were to serve Christians:

¹⁶⁹ Fredriksen, Paula, “Paul,” *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Ed. Allan Fitzgerald, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ Fredriksen, Paula, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*, New York: Doubleday, 2008, xii.

“Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall overcome the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger.”... “The elder shall serve the younger,” is understood by our writers, almost without exception, to mean that the elder people, the Jews, shall serve the younger people, the Christians.¹⁷¹

Having made the Jews firmly subservient to their Christian masters, Augustine quoted Psalm 69:22 as a prediction of Jewish subservience: “It was predicted: ‘Let their own table prove a snare in their presence, and a retribution and a stumbling block. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they may not see. Bend down their backs always.’”¹⁷² Let them survive in Christendom, but, for Christ’s sake, do not let them thrive! Their backs must be bent, and they must be at home nowhere. One thing is clear; although Jewish property and person was to be protected from overzealous Christians intent on persecuting or converting Jews, they most certainly were not equal partners in society, having lost that status as a direct result of their refusal to embrace Christ.

The Legacy of Augustine

Augustine’s thought had a profound impact on Jewish-Christian relations for millennia to come, both protecting Jews from persecution and, at the same time, giving divine sanction for their oppression. Augustine’s revolutionary message of mercy, Fredriksen contends, “protected Jewish communities in Europe for centuries.”¹⁷³ However, that legacy also led to pogroms throughout the European continent. To say that Augustine’s legacy is mixed in this regard is to put it lightly; there is an inherent tension between ensuring Jewish survival and preventing

¹⁷¹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 16.35.

¹⁷² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46.

¹⁷³ Fredriksen, “Paul,” *Augustine Throughout the Ages*, 624.

Jewish communities from thriving. At what point does a community cross that line, and what measures are appropriate to curtail Jewish accomplishment?

The first part of Augustine's legacy, that of protection of Jewish communities, is extensive and well documented. To begin with, Gregory I endorsed the Augustinian position concerning the Jews, opposing the forced conversions of his day in a letter to the bishop of Naples: "One must act, therefore, in such a way that...they might desire to follow us rather than to fly from us...Rather let them enjoy their lawful liberty to observe and to celebrate their festivities, as they have enjoyed this up until now."¹⁷⁴ Importantly, Gregory I's letter began with the Latin phrase *Sicut Judaeis*, meaning "and thus to the Jews," a phrase that a long line of subsequent popes would also adopt as the beginning to their decrees on rights and privileges of the Jews, to little effect.¹⁷⁵ Alexander III's *Sicut Judaeis*, the earliest extant after Gregory I's, repeats much of Augustine's doctrine:

[The Jews] ought to suffer no prejudice... For we make the law that no Christian compel them, unwilling or refusing, by violence to come to baptism... Too, no Christian ought to presume...to injure their persons, or with violence to take their property... Besides, in the celebration of their own festivities, no one ought disturb them in any way... if anyone, however, shall attempt, the tenor of this degree once known, to go against it...let him be punished by the vengeance of excommunication.¹⁷⁶

Without Augustine's strong, forceful rejection of forced baptism and violence against the Jews in the early fifth century, none of the *Sicut Judaeis* decrees were thinkable, as they all rested firmly on Augustine's doctrine.

¹⁷⁴ Gregory I, *Sicut Judaeis*, trans. by Synan.

¹⁷⁵ *Sicut Judaeis* was repeated throughout the centuries by the following popes: Alexander III, Celestine III (1191-1198), Innocent III (1199), Honorius III (1216), Gregory IX (1235), Innocent IV (1246), Alexander IV (1255), Urban IV (1262), Gregory X (1272 & 1274), Nicholas III, Martin IV (1281), Honorius IV (1285-1287), Nicholas IV (1288-92), Clement VI (1348), Urban V (1365), Boniface IX (1389), Martin V (1422), and Nicholas V (1447). The need to repeat the decree throughout the Middle Ages shows the lack of impact the decree actually had in decreasing forced conversions and violence against the Jews.

¹⁷⁶ Alexander III, *Sicut Judaeis*, trans. by Synan.

Besides official, papal endorsement of the Augustinian legacy, one can also see in firsthand accounts the impact Augustine's thought had on restraining violence against the Jews. Ephraim of Bonn preserved for posterity the following tale of the Massacre of York (1190 CE):

The Lord heard our outcry, and He turned to us and had mercy upon us. In His great mercy and grace, He sent a decent priest, one honored and respected by all the clergy in France, named Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux...[who said] "It is good that you go against the Ishmaelites. But whosoever touches a Jew to take his life, is like one who harms Jesus himself...for in the Book of Psalms it is written of them: "Slay them not, lest my people forget."¹⁷⁷

Augustinian logic dripped off of Bernard of Clairvaux's tongue effortlessly, and it is not by accident that almost eight centuries after Augustine laid out his doctrine, it was still being cited in the defense of Jews. But Augustine's defense of Judaism also employed the same anti-Jewish rhetoric that his views on the Jews tempered. The Jews had a place in Augustine's rhetoric, but it was as a witness people, subservient to Christians and forced to play second fiddle to a Christian soteriology. Even when presented with a Christian who is, by Late Antiquity's standards, tolerant, anti-Jewish rhetoric still made a prominent appearance.

Concluding Remarks

The writings of Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Augustine utilized anti-Judaism, albeit in different contexts and with different aims in mind, in order to construct a Christian identity that they favor as orthodox. Faced with the theological challenge of incorporating Jewish scriptures, culture, and antiquity, while at the same time maintaining an identity separate from Judaism, Christianity historically reacted to Judaism with ambivalence, affirming it as the core of the Christian tradition and, in the same breath, deeming it insufficient and superseded. Christians in Late Antiquity faced virulent criticism because, while they claimed

¹⁷⁷ Ephraim of Bonn, *Sefer Zekhirah*, trans by Eidelberg

to supersede Judaism, they had failed to convert the Jews; the fact that a vibrant Jewish culture was extant even after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was a constant thorn in the sides of many Church Fathers. In fact, Julian the Apostate deployed promises to rebuild the temple in 363 CE as part of his large-scale effort to discredit Christianity and weaken its claim of triumphalism.¹⁷⁸ Judaism was a superseded religion that refused to fade away or be engulfed by Christianity, and, as a result, was ardently opposed by Ambrose of Milan and Chrysostom on the grounds of their deicide and refusal to convert. Their mere existence was an attack on the Christian faith, causing authors like Chrysostom to attack them as demons in league with the perennial adversary of the faithful, Satan himself. Against this backdrop of Late Antiquity, Chrysostom and Ambrose developed an anti-Jewish rhetoric of negation and opposition: Christians are not Jews, and opposition to Judaism is service to God. Even when figures such as Augustine presented a new rhetoric concerning the Jews, it still incorporated traditional Christian anti-Judaism as represented by Ambrose and Chrysostom.

Faced with the reality that anti-Judaism was, in many cases at least, a defining feature of Late Antique Christianity, one is forced to concede that, even if not drawing from the works of St. Ambrose, St. Chrysostom, and certainly Augustine, directly, the theological formulations of anti-Judaism and antisemitism in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* have many points of intersection with the arguments found in these Church Fathers. God has forsaken the Jews; therefore, their property and perhaps livelihoods are forfeit. Nothing in Chrysostom or Ambrose's theology sought the survival of Judaism as a separate religion from Christianity. That being said, one point of contention between the theology of these Late Antique Church Fathers and the Reich Church concerns the definition of a Jew. Is a Jew a follower of Judaism, or

¹⁷⁸ See: Ehrman and Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity*, New York: OUP, 2004, 48, and Julian the Apostate, "To the Community of the Jews," trans. by Ehrman and Jacobs. "I may rebuilt by my own efforts the sacred city of Jerusalem, which for many years you have longed to inhabit."

someone who belongs to the Jews as a people, a race? The Nazi use of racial formulations represented something separate and distinct from Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine's faith-based anti-Judaism. Here, context also becomes important. Christian anti-Judaism in Late Antiquity varied from locality to locality and was aimed against the Jews in a complex bid to win political prestige and enforce newly developing concepts of orthodoxy. In short, Judaism and Christianity were, at least on some levels, competing for hegemony and power. By the time of the NSDAP's rise to power, the Jews were a relatively marginalized religion, and, thus, in far less competition with Christianity. Yet they were persecuted using some of the same rhetoric as 1500 years past.

As mentioned previously, this chapter traced the development of anti-Judaism through Late Antiquity . It bears repeating that out of the above-discussed texts, canonical scripture had the most impact on NSDAP theologians. However, it is important to trace the development of anti-Jewish rhetoric because of the intersection it had with Reich Church policies and because it begs the question of continuity. If NSDAP leaders were not reading Chrysostom, who were they reading, and how did his rhetoric impact them? With that question, we come to the Third Chapter and one of Germany's greatest historical figures, Martin Luther.

Chapter 3: The Luther Problem

Now that we have selectively discussed early Christian anti-Judaism through the representative figures of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine, we can move on to another central figure in that legacy, Martin Luther. Luther builds on the tradition that we have traced through the abovementioned figures, rehashing many of their same arguments. As a result, the particulars of his anti-Jewish rhetoric are not the main theme of this chapter. Instead, it will focus on the legacy of his ecclesiology in Germany, as made especially evident in the Peasants' War of 1525, and how the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* appropriated his Christian anti-Judaism to serve its own purposes.

The complex, scholarly debate surrounding this appropriation of Luther is part of a larger debate about the continuity and divergence between Christian anti-Judaism and the antisemitic policies of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* as expressed in its liturgy, scripture, and action. It also allows us to more deeply analyze of the complex forces that have been implicit from the first chapter of this thesis - race and nationalism. In this sense, chapter three acts as a bridge between the first two chapters, which lay the framework for our discussion of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and Christian anti-Judaism, and the conclusion where we will return to the analysis of German Protestantism during the *Kirchenkampf*. At the conclusion of this chapter, we will possess all the tools necessary to enter into a high-level dialogue on these issues.

The Peasants' War, Capitulation, and Church-State Relations

Luther changed the world forever in 1517 when he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.¹⁷⁹ Over the next five years, he was excommunicated, cast out from his monastic order, and marked as an outlaw at the Diet of Worms for his opposition to the papacy, its system of indulgences, its unwillingness to allow scripture to be printed in the vernacular, and its veneration of saints. His basic dichotomy was between the law and the gospel, a concept he drew from Paul's epistles, which he used to critique the hegemony of the Catholic Church by appealing to the fact that "Gospel transcends the law."¹⁸⁰ The counter-hegemonic and persecuted nature of Luther's ministry, however, quickly ossified into Luther's desire to create a stable religious system of his own. In the process, he became politically powerful in his own right, and made some crucial decisions concerning the Radical Reformation, that section of the Reformation that opposed clericalism, secular interference in religious affairs, and the magisterial reformers, such as Zwingli and Luther, by seeking the removal of the boundary between secular and religious freedom.¹⁸¹ In making these decisions, Luther forever shaped the nature of both the mainstream Reformation and, importantly for our discussion, German religion in particular.

The first of these decisions concerned his response to the Peasants' War of 1525. The Peasants of Upper Swabia rebelled, offering as their rationale a document of grievances called the Twelve Articles that pushed Luther's Reformation principle of spiritual equality, the priesthood of all believers, into the temporal realm. They appealed to Reformation principles, claiming, "If

¹⁷⁹ Although popular culture likes to portray this event as a revolutionary act, Luther was only acting in accordance with his capacity as a professor and the church door functioned much like a community bulletin board does in today's context.

¹⁸⁰ As quoted in Althaus, Paul, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1966, 365.

¹⁸¹ Lindberg, Carter, *The European Reformations*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2009, 213.

one or more of the articles presented here be not in accordance with the Word of God... and such articles be demonstrated to us to be incompatible.... then we will abandon them, when it is explained to us on the basis of scripture.”¹⁸² Luther responded initially with an *Admonition to Peace* that castigated the princes for longstanding abuses but, at its core, reminded the Swabian peasants, “the fact that the rulers are wicked and unjust does not excuse disorder and rebellion.”¹⁸³ The situation had deteriorated by May of 1525 and Luther wrote *Against the Rioting Peasants*.¹⁸⁴ In this work Luther calls the peasants “mad dogs,” who must be killed, adding that he “will not oppose a ruler who... will smite and punish these peasants without first offering to submit the case to judgment.”¹⁸⁵ After all, “if a man is in open rebellion, everyone is both his judge and executioner.”¹⁸⁶ Having been repudiated by Luther, many peasants laid down their arms, only to be slaughtered by their lords. The movement that Luther had helped to spark through his Reformation principles lay in shambles as what once served as a weapon for the people, a translation of the Bible into the vernacular, was thrown in their face to subdue rebellion.

One thing was certain: “Peasants and commoners who had thought Luther’s gospel of freedom had implications for their social, political, or economic well-being were not definitively disabused of this notion.”¹⁸⁷ The mainstream Reformation distanced itself from the radical

¹⁸² As quoted in Ed. Tom Scott and Bob Scribner, *The German Peasants’ War: A History in Documents*, New York: Humanity Books, 1991.

¹⁸³ Luther, *Admonition to Peace* as printed in Ed. Denis R. Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008, 171.

¹⁸⁴ It only received its more drastic titles like *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants* because the printers wanted to intensify Luther’s work.

¹⁸⁵ Luther, *Against the Rioting Peasants*, as printed in Ed. Denis R. Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008, 177.

¹⁸⁶ Luther, *Against the Rioting Peasants*, 177.

¹⁸⁷ Ed. Denis R. Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008, 177.

Reformation in order to secure its place in the halls of power, for what self-respecting lord allows a faith that supports rebellion to grow in his territory? To side with the peasants and apply spiritual notions of equality to the political situation would have meant suicide for the movement and, as some have pointed out, the end of Luther's power. Speaking after the fact, one commentator put it this way: "the rumor among the people is that Doctor Martin has lost the support of the Elector of Saxony unless he sells foxes' brushes to the other princes and the nobility."¹⁸⁸ In other words, Luther had been reduced to offering sycophantic flatteries to the nobles. Marxist historians also seize upon Luther's capitulation to the nobility. Friedrich Engels' *The Peasant War in Germany* offers this interpretation:

Luther, the protégé of the Elector of Saxony, the respected professor of Wittenberg who had become powerful and famous overnight, the great man who was surrounded by a coterie of servile creatures and flatterers, did not hesitate a moment. He dropped the popular elements of the movement, and joined the train of the middle-class, the nobility and the princes... Thus Luther repudiated not only the peasant insurrection but even his own revolt against religious and lay authority. He not only betrayed the popular movement to the princes, but the middle-class movement as well.¹⁸⁹

Luther capitulated, content to have his spiritual ideas remain in that realm and unwilling to allow them to achieve any sort of sociopolitical actualization. This was not out of a total lack of concern for the plight of the peasants, as can be seen in his *Admonition to Peace*, but out of a certain pragmatism. Luther was interested in instituting concrete religious reforms on the brink of Christ's second coming as true Reformer.¹⁹⁰ To do so, he felt he must enter into an alliance with the princes at the price of abandoning the peasants. Concerning the question of "who

¹⁸⁸ Mülpfort, Hermann, "The Consequences of Luther's Stance during the Peasants' War," *The German Peasants' War*, 323.

¹⁸⁹ Engels, Friedrich, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Leonard Kreiger, in *The German Revolutions*, Chicago, UCP, 1967, 40, 43.

¹⁹⁰ Oberman, Heiko, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 209.

profited by the revolution of 1525,” Engels contends there can only be one answer, “the princes.”¹⁹¹ Without Luther’s support, Margraves Casimir and George of Bradenberg could never have argued, “Christian freedom does not consist of removal of rents, interests, dues, tithes, taxes, services or other external burdens, but is only an inward and spiritual thing...all subjects are obliged to obey their authorities.”¹⁹² One contemporary of Luther’s put it simply, “the poor have been forgotten.”¹⁹³ Luther fattened himself while the peasants were forced to yoke themselves to nobles’ carts in a show of submission.

Luther’s abandonment of the peasantry and reinforcement of the nobles’ authority, combined with his attack against the Anabaptists and Zwickau Prophets, served to subjugate the spiritual to the temporal. It was clear who was in charge and what interpretation of the gospel Luther chose to endorse. Instead of bishops and princes exercising control over the affairs of the people, the bishops were cast out and the princes received their share of the power too. By handing the lords the *ius reformandi* (right of Reformation) in their territories, he contended that “political authorities should take matters into their own hands”¹⁹⁴:

The Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as a common enemy... Inasmuch as the temporal power has become a member of the Christian body, it is a *spiritual estate*, even though its work is physical. Therefore, its work should extend without hindrance to *all the members of the whole body* to punish and *use force* whenever guilt deserves or necessity demands... We [the Christian nobility in conjunction with Luther] should excommunicate [the pope] and drive him out.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 4.

¹⁹² Casimir and George of Bradenberg, “Edict on the Preaching of the Gospel of the Peasants’ War, 30 August 1525,” *The German Peasants War: A History in Documents*, 331.

¹⁹³ Mülpfort, Hermann, “The Consequences of Luther’s Stance during the Peasants’ War,” 323.

¹⁹⁴ Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 98,

¹⁹⁵ Luther, Martin, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate (1520),” *A Reformation Reader*, 103, 99-100, 102.

This has obvious connections with the *Kirchenkampf* because it foreshadowed a domination of spiritual affairs by the temporal. In Germany, the princes were in control of their territories spiritual orientations, a notion that was ossified by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. When the noble in question was a friendly, bigamous Philip of Hesse or the level-headed Zurich Council, this framework operated well, but when the noble in question was Adolf Hitler or the NSDAP, the system created by Luther yielded horrid results.

Luther and the Jews

Towards the end of his life, in 1543, Luther wrote an infamous tract, *Von die Juden und Ihren Lügen*, or *On the Jews and Their Lies*. This work represented a break from his 1523 essay, *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*, or *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, where Luther argued for tolerance:

If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian... We must receive [Jews] cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life.¹⁹⁶

Luther was convinced that Jews had not already become Christians due to the corruption of the Church. Having led the Reformation, he expected a sweeping conversion of the Jews because the Gospel would be preached in its true form. When events did not turn out as planned, Luther retaliated with *On the Jews and Their Lies*. In it, Luther contended that the Jews are a “base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must

¹⁹⁶ Luther, Martin, “That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew,” *Luther’s Works*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1962, 201, 229.

be accounted as filth.”¹⁹⁷ He claimed that the Jews were “not worthy of looking at the outside of the Bible, much less of reading it,” instructing them to “read only the bible that is found under the sow’s tail, and eat and drink the letters that drop from there.”¹⁹⁸ Luther urged his allies among the princes to “burn down their synagogues, forbid...them to work, and deal harshly with them.”¹⁹⁹ He also advised that “all their prayer books...be taken from them...[that] their rabbis be forbidden to teach...[that their] safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely.”²⁰⁰ In doing so Luther was not stating much that was new. He merely rehashed many of the same arguments that Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine had made centuries earlier.

Nazi Appropriations of Luther

However, this matter is complicated by the NSDAP’s efforts to build on the prestige of Luther and this infamous tract. Hitler praised Luther in *Mein Kampf*, stating, “These, however, are not only really great statesmen, but also...great reformers. Side by side with Frederick the Great stands a Martin Luther as well as a Richard Wagner.”²⁰¹ In 1944 Konstantin von Neurath proclaimed, at a celebration of the four hundred fiftieth anniversary of Luther’s birth, that “the mighty development of the spiritual life of the German *Volk*, even outside the sphere of the religious, is unthinkable without Luther.”²⁰² The Third Reich was fond of Luther and placed him

¹⁹⁷ Luther, Martin, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, as quoted in *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*, 113.

¹⁹⁸ Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, 113.

¹⁹⁹ Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, 115.

²⁰⁰ Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, 114.

²⁰¹ Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf: My Struggle*, trans. Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941, 287.

²⁰² As quoted in *Holy Hatred*, 120.

on their coinage as a great German and fighter against outside influences. They also used *On the Jews and Their Lies* frequently, for example in a speech from Hans Schemm, the Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture: “the older and more experienced [Luther] became, the less he could understand the Jew. His engagement against the decomposing Jewish spirit is clearly evident...from his writing against the Jews.”²⁰³

Sadly, the connections between Luther and the NSDAP do not end with mere hateful rhetoric. On November 10, 1938 Nazis committed the atrocity known as *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass. One prominent German Christian, Martin Sasse greeted the event with joy, gleefully exclaiming, “on November 10, 1938, Luther’s birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany.” Two days later he reprinted a copy of Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* and urged the German people in his foreword to heed the words of “the greatest antisemite of his time, the warner of his people against the Jews.”²⁰⁴ Some scholars such as Diarmaid MacCulloch view Luther’s tract as a blueprint for *Kristallnacht*, and one has to admit that setting fire to synagogues, homes, and the sacred books of the Jews appeared prominently in Luther’s plan for dealing with the Jews. One must also face the fact that the NSDAP featured *On the Jews and Their Lies* prominently in a glass case at the Nuremberg Rallies.²⁰⁵

This leads us into the scholarly debates about the influence Luther’s writing exercised in the emergence of Nazi thought. One camp asserts that Luther’s “conclusions about the Jews were nearly identical to those of the Nazi regime and virtually the same as Hitler’s final solution

²⁰³ As quoted in *Holy Hatred*, 120.

²⁰⁴ As quoted in Goldhagen, Daniel, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York: Random House, 1997, 111.

²⁰⁵ Reeves, Michael and Dever, Mark, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation*, New York: B&H Publishing, 2010, 64.

itself.”²⁰⁶ These scholars conclude with the renowned German philosopher, Karl Jaspers, that, in Luther, “you already have the whole Nazi program.”²⁰⁷ William Shirer is one of the most radical adherents to this view, tying Martin Luther directly to the *Shoah*: “It is difficult to understand the behavior of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things: their history and the influence of Martin Luther...He wanted Germany rid of the Jews. Luther's advice was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering and Himmler.”²⁰⁸ Alan Dershowitz holds a similar viewpoint: “Toward the end of his life – and at the height of his influence – Luther articulated a specific program against the Jews which... culminat[ed] in the Holocaust.”²⁰⁹

I join the group of scholars who take issue with this thesis. I charge the above with being far too simplistic on two counts. The first concerns the general relationship of Luther and his writings to the Third Reich. These scholars assume without justification that Luther’s writings on the Jews wielded direct influence on Nazi leaders, contending that one can easily draw a line of descent from Luther to Hitler. This has been shown to be an assumption based on all-too-little evidence. For one, Johannes Wallmann has demonstrated that “Luther’s writings against the Jews were largely ignored in the [eighteenth] and [nineteenth] centuries.”²¹⁰ Moreover, from what research that has been done later in the nineteenth century, Uwe Simeon-Netto, author of *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth*, argues that it was because the

²⁰⁶ Michael, Robert, *Holy Hatred*, 121.

²⁰⁷ As quoted in Merkle, John C., and Harrelson, Walter J. Eds. *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism*, New York: Liturgical Press, 2003, 64.

²⁰⁸ Shirer, William, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 262 as quoted in Anderson, Cheryl, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 23.

²⁰⁹ Dershowitz, Alan, *Chutzpah*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992, 106.

²¹⁰ Wallmann, Johannes, “The Reception of Luther’s Writings on the Jews from the Reformation to the End of the 19th Century,” *Lutheran Quaterly*, 1.1, 1987, 72-97, as quoted in *Church Schism and Corruption*

NSDAP was already antisemitic that they *revived* the printing of his *On the Jews and Their Lies*, which had fallen into relative obscurity.²¹¹ More than being influenced by Luther's work, they mainly just used it to their own advantage.

This also cuts to the heart of another issue. Those who link Luther to Nazi antisemitism fail to adequately recognize the reason why the NSDAP sought to use his name so often in speeches, party functions, and imagery. It was less because his anti-Judaism played into the hands of their ideology, and more because he was German in a real, tangible sense. In the same way that Mussolini wanted to link his state to Rome and the fasces, Hitler wanted to bind his Reich to concrete historical figures, utilize the symbols associated with those figures, and create a community based on those symbols, the *Volk*. If Hitler was merely looking for a vicious enemy of the Jews, any number of theologians from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages would have sufficed, but there is a reason Luther is emphasized and not St. John Chrysostom. Luther was German and the Reformation, after all, "was a German event."²¹² What the Luther-Hitler theorists see as a direct line of descent appears more as a circle with the NSDAP reinterpreting a German figure as it suits them. This is especially true because Luther lived so many years and exhibited so many opinions that one can usually find what one wants in Luther's writings. It is important to note that Niemöller also used Luther's law and gospel dynamic in opposition to NSDAP. He asserted that the gospel transcends all, including race, and claimed, perhaps more credibly than the NSDAP, that "there is absolutely no sense in talking of Luther and celebrating his memory within the Protestant church if we stop at Luther's image and do not look to Him to

²¹¹ Simeon-Netto, Uwe, *The Fabricated Luther*, New York: Concordia, 1995, 17-26 and *Church Schism and Corruption*.

²¹² Emden, Christian and Midgley, David R., *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German Speaking World*, Berne: European Academic Publishers, 2004, 145.

whom Luther pointed.”²¹³

The second point we must contest is the equation of Luther’s religious-based anti-Judaism with the NSDAP’s racially-based antisemitism. To Luther, the Jews were Jews because of their religious choice; they “scourged, crucified, spat upon, blasphemed, and cursed God in his word....the true Messiah, one whom his own people had crucified, condemned, cursed, and persecuted without end.”²¹⁴ To the Nazis, the Jews’ very blood was tainted, so much so that one drop was enough to abrogate citizenship in the Reich.²¹⁵ These are fundamentally different points of view and, while the word “Jew” might be the same, they refer to different constructs of the term. Martin Brecht agrees that “Luther however, was not involved with later racial antisemitism. There is a world of difference between his belief in salvation and a racial ideology.”²¹⁶ Josel of Rosheim likewise contends, “Luther never became an anti-Semite in the modern, racial sense of the term.”²¹⁷ Luther, however fatally pessimistic and bitter he became about the prospects of converting the Jews after his first attempts at this failed, made it clear that he would have accepted their conversion. Baptism would have been enough to make one a Christian, whereas the Nazis’ racially-based antisemitism did not recognize the power of a baptism to change one’s racial category. A Jew could never resign from his race. While the theory of a direct descent from Luther to Hitler might be appealing in its simplicity, it lacks nuance and appears more as a blunt axe than the finely crafted scalpel one needs to dissect the

²¹³ As quoted in Colson, Charles, *God and Government: an Insider’s View on the Boundaries Between Faith and Politics*, New York: Zondervan, 2007, 154.

²¹⁴ Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, 110.

²¹⁵ Corcos, Alain, *The Myth of Jewish Race: A Biologist’s Point of View*, Cranbury: Associated University Press, 2005, 34.

²¹⁶ As quoted in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol. 36, 1997, 31.

²¹⁷ As quoted in Kittleson, James M., *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, 274.

intricate connections between Luther, Germany, and the Third Reich.

Importantly, although the differences between Luther and Nazi ideology are manifest, one must also take care not to distance anti-Judaism too far from antisemitism; one laid the foundation for the other. With this in mind, we can enter a more complex discussion of the impact of race and nationalism on the development of antisemitism in the Third Reich. Here, Luther acts as touchstone for our analysis of the relationship between Christian anti-Judaism, race, nationalism, and antisemitism, a relationship that comes into greater focus with Hans Hinkels' statement: "With Luther, the revolution of German blood and feeling against alien elements of the *Volk* has begun....To continue and complete his Protestantism, *nationalism* must make the picture of Luther... a German fighter."²¹⁸

New Developments: Race and Nationalism

In order to facilitate discussion of this hotly debated topic, a history of antisemitism is needed. The nineteenth century represented a pivotal turning point in the history of the hatred of Jews. Converging factors acted to bring about a focus on race. Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* brought about a new way of viewing the processes of nature and many used his concepts of natural selection to justify a new view of race, nationality, and history. Applying these biological rules to history and the social realm, Social Darwinists insisted, was the only proper way to understand the world. Indeed, Social Darwinists "preferred to see their doctrine as a necessary consequence of Darwin's scientific theory."²¹⁹ This led to some harsh theories. Herbert Spencer, a pioneer in Social Darwinism who coined the term "survival of the fittest," was of the

²¹⁸ As quoted in *Holy Hatred*, 120.

²¹⁹ Rogers, James Allen, "Darwinism and Social Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 280.

opinion that social progress depended on “continuous over-running of the less powerful or less adapted by the more powerful or more adapted, a driving of inferior varieties into undesirable habitats, and occasionally, an extermination of inferior varieties.”²²⁰ Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist and philosopher, in his 1900 work, *Die Weltr thsel*,²²¹ put it this way:

Is the history of nations...any different [from Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*]?... No! The fate of those branches of the human family, which, as nations and *races*, have struggled for survival and progress for millennia now, is governed by the same external, iron laws that have determined the history of the entire organic world which for millions of years has provided life on earth...the victors in the struggle for life were not always the nobler or more perfect forms.²²²

This understanding of the world placed a new importance on one’s race and culture. While those outside a culture’s norms had typically been persecuted throughout history, making the issue depend on one’s “race” represented something new. In fact, the concept of race was very much a modern concept, having come into standardized use in the eighteenth century.²²³ Now races were pitted *against one another* in a global competition for survival based on Social Darwinist thought.

Within this line of thought, race and nation complemented each other; one’s race should have its own nation, its own identity separate from other races. Social Darwinism inevitably fed into another preexisting, major thread of the nineteenth century, nationalism. Frequently authors pointed to their race or nation’s superiority in order to bolster nationalist claims and, as some

²²⁰ As quoted in: Rutledge, Dennis “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 244.

²²¹ English: *The Riddles of the Universe*

²²² Haeckel, Ernst, *Die Weltr thsel*, 311-314, trans. by Joseph McCabe. As quoted in *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*.

²²³ Smedley, Brian D. and Smedley, Aubrey, “Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism As a Social Problem Is Real: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on the Social Construction of Race,” *American Psychologist*, January 2005, 19.

would argue, channel the newly empowered masses' political energies into conservative efforts as opposed to socialism. Nationalist visions such as these in Germany, and many other localities, typically excluded Jews as "alien" to the nation, with the obvious exception of the Jewish brand of nationalism, Zionism. This same race-nation rhetoric is repeated by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the son-in-law of Richard Wagner, in his *Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*.²²⁴ In it, Chamberlain contended that Greeks and Romans were culture-creators and therefore Aryan, while Jews were culture-destroyers:

The entrance of the Jew into European history...[was] alien to that which Europe had already achieved...The Teuton has proved himself so superior among his kinsmen intellectually, morally, and physically...If we look around us today, we see that the importance of each nation as a living power is proportionate to the amount of truly Teutonic blood among its population...Only Teutons sit on the thrones of Europe.²²⁵

This model obviously depended on Social Darwinist notions of race and competition. In its German form, nationalism is perhaps best summed up in an easy to remember propaganda tune: "Ohne Juda, Ohne Rom/ Wird gebaut Germaniens Dom!" or "Without Judah, without Rome/ Our German cathedral shall be built."²²⁶ One's national identity necessitated the creation of boundaries, and, in this case, Jews were to be excluded from the pan-Germanic vision.

Social Darwinism coupled with nationalist thought created an atmosphere in which a new way to hate Jews developed. This new development, which is hereafter called antisemitism, was based on race instead of religion. This is evident in the way the term was coined. Wilhelm Marr, another German, coined the term *antisemitismus* in his *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum: Vom nicht confessionellen Standpunkt aus betrachtet* or *The Victory of the*

²²⁴ English: *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*

²²⁵ Haeckel, Ernst, *Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 463-464, trans. by John Lees. As quoted in *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*.

²²⁶ Quoted in Remak, Joachim, *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*, Project Heights: Waveland Press, 1990, 10.

Jewish Spirit over the German Spirit: As Observed from a non-religious perspective, precisely to construct a term for his hatred of Jews from a secular, rather than religious, perspective.²²⁷ The very term was developed to be different from the prevailing anti-Judaism of the day, based as it was on theological grounds. Bernard Lazare, in his immensely influential 1894 *Antisemitism: Its History and Its Causes*, gives us a contemporary account of the development of antisemitism:

Once a matter of sentiment, the hostility towards the Jews became one of reason. The Christians of yesterday hated the deicides instinctively, and they never attempted to justify their animosity: they showed it. The antisemites of to-day conceived a desire to explain their hatred, *i.e.*, they wanted to dignify it: anti-Judaism molted into antisemitism...It was born in Germany... For the Jew, not being an Aryan, has not the same moral, social and intellectual conceptions as the Aryan; he is irreducible, and therefore he must be eliminated, or else he will ruin the nations that have received him.²²⁸

In this way, Lazare formulated a workable framework from which one can view both anti-Judaism and what was, in his opinion, modern antisemitism. He formulates anti-Judaism as the hatred of “yesterday” based on the Jews crucifixion of Jesus and states that the new antisemitism is more philosophical and related to the ideas of race and nation building that emerged in the nineteenth century and culminated with the Third Reich. Georg von Schönerer, who would later receive praise in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, also made a distinction between earlier anti-Judaism and the new antisemitism based on race and nationalism:

It is pure madness to attack the Jews solely because of their faith. Whoever claims that we are fighting the Jews because of their religion is [gravely mistaken]...Our antisemitism is not directed against the Jews’ religion. It is directed against their racial characteristics...Every loyal son of his nation must see in antisemitism the greatest national progress.²²⁹

²²⁷ Of course, many scholars have shown the ultimately unsatisfying nature of this “secular vs. religious” dichotomy. Still, as a first approximation of a more complex reality it points to an important distinction. See: Jakobsen, Janet R. and Pellegrini, Ann, *Secularisms*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

²²⁸ Lazare, Bernard, “Chapter 9: Modern Antisemitism and its Literature,” *Antisemitism: Its History and Its Causes*, 1894, from the Jewish History Sourcebook.

²²⁹ Schönerer, Georg von, “Speech of April 28, 1887” as seen in Remak, Joachim, *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*, 7.

Hitler would later reinforce such ideas in *Mein Kampf*, where he contended that attacking Jews because of their religion was nonsensical: “In the Jew I still saw only a man who was of a different religion, and therefore, on grounds of human tolerance, I was against the idea that he should be attacked because he had a different faith.”²³⁰ Antisemitism, nationalism, and Social Darwinism emerged together and fed off each other to become the driving forces of the nineteenth century, and, in the case of the Third Reich, the twentieth.

It should be noted that, in many cases, the concepts of religion, nationalism, and race overlap, blurring their distinctions and often combining with another concept that was also developing around this same time, culture. Still, the emergence of these concepts paved the way for the NSDAP’s brand of antisemitism. Having such tools to use in our analysis allows us to analyze the situation with greater depth.

Concluding Remarks

Through our analysis of Luther we can better understand the complexities of tracing the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism. The scholarly debates surrounding Luther’s anti-Judaism and how it fed into the NSDAP and the antisemitism of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* mirror the larger debates about issues that dominate this thesis. In this chapter we learned that there were both continuities and divergences in the legacy of Luther’s anti-Judaism and Nazi antisemitism, with both Reich Church and Confessing Church members wielding his legacy in the battle for hegemony. Continuities in this legacy present themselves through the use of Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* as a proof-text for antisemitic action. Divergences arise when the Nazis utilize the concepts of nationalism and race in pursuit of antisemitic action. To

²³⁰ Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf*, trans. by Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941, 68.

equate Luther's *On the Jews on Their Lies* with Nazi antisemitism is too cheap and simplistic, but neither can we fail to recognize the role Luther's text played in the long history of Christian anti-Judaism in a particularly German sense. At the close of this chapter, we can now return, equipped with better tools, to our analysis of the antisemitic liturgy, worship, and exegesis of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. This chapter has served to bridge the gap between the Christian anti-Judaism of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine and the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, allowing us to engage in these debates with greater precision and nuance.

Chapter 4: Continuities, Divergences, and Alternative Reflections

The chief concerns raised by this mountain of evidence concerning Christianity's shockingly consistent use of anti-Judaism is how this legacy of anti-Judaism feeds into the deployment of antisemitism in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* as represented in its liturgy, worship, and exegesis, and what alternative legacies and sources of meaning were developed in response to the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. How is the subjugation of Jews based on their religion related to the NSDAP's race-based conception of antisemitism?²³¹ Are the two related, the same, or completely different? Does one feed into the other? When the Reich Church de-judaized its tradition, scripture, hymns, catechism, and structure, did it actively break with the religiously fueled anti-Judaism that is an undeniable part of Christianity, or was it merely an unavoidable expression of anti-Judaism, representing continuity?

The scholarly debates surrounding these issues dominate this chapter and serve as a frame for our discussion of the continuities with and divergences from the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the Reich Church. In these debates, I support a middle-road position that recognizes both the contributions Christian anti-Judaism made to the NSDAP and Reich Church's antisemitism, but also the differences between Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism. This realization discredits both scholars who posit a sharp dichotomy between a truly Christian Confessing Church and a falsely Christian *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, as well as theories that simply conflate anti-Judaism with antisemitism. In taking sides in this debate, I extend the discussion for what this means for the Christian tradition as a whole, contending that my

²³¹ Recall that in *Guiding Principles of the German Christians*, 1932, "Faith in Christ does not destroy race, it deepens and sanctifies it."

framework forces Christianity to acknowledge the guilt it bears for its complicity in the legacy of anti-Judaism. However, I also provide examples through Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemöller, and Dorothee Sölle of the types of truly positive Christianity that resulted from reflection on the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the *Shoah*. If Christian anti-Judaism represents a dark legacy, there also exists the potential for a legacy that liberates. I propose that we view the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the Confessing Church as engaging in a battle for hegemony by wielding various legacies within Christianity against each other. From the Confessing Church and subsequent reflection on that institution's praxis emerges a positive and persuasive legacy of Christianity that gives our discussion of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* greater nuance.

The Debate: (Christian?) Antisemitism and the Reich Church

The question of whether the racially based antisemitism of the Third Reich and subsequent changes made to Protestantism through the German Christian movement represent continuity with or a divergence from the Christian legacy of anti-Judaism is monstrously complex. One common way that scholars have approached the dividing line between antisemitism and anti-Judaism is by focusing on baptism, which “in [anti-Judaism] saves the individual Jew by removing him from Judaism, but in [antisemitism] is deemed ineffectual against the alleged immutability of Jewish ‘biology.’”²³² As Schönerer put it, “you cannot resign from your race.” For the antisemites, race transcended mere membership in a church or a synagogue.

²³² Steigmann-Gall, Richard, “Old Wine in New Bottles?” *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, Edited by, Kevin P. Spicer, Bloomington: IUP, 2007, 289.

Scholars tend to divide into three camps on the issue of German antisemitism: those who believe religious anti-Judaism “played no part in the formation of its racialist counterpart,”²³³ those who equate anti-Judaism and antisemitism without regard to the differences between the two, and a middle way, those who adopt a nuanced approach that recognizes the role Christian anti-Judaism had in allowing racially based antisemitism to take hold but resists equating the two. All three have their strong points, and it is worthwhile for us to spend some time with each viewpoint before determining which is most persuasive and useful.

The first viewpoint is expressed by Alan E. Steinweis in his 2006 work *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany*. According to Steinweis, Hitler believed that anti-Judaism based on emotion and religion would be insufficient, leading “only to pogroms, which contribute little to a permanent solution.”²³⁴ Because of this, Hitler decided the German people needed a “scientific understanding” of the Jew coupled with the realization that “Jewry is without question a race and not a religious community.”²³⁵ In this view, “Nazi antisemitism made it qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from prior expressions of Jew-hatred and, therefore, not rooted in them.”²³⁶ William Sheridan Allen in his *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945* also downplays the link between Christian anti-Judaism and the antisemitism of the NSDAP. Stephen T. Katz, in a recent interview stated this position succinctly: “The Jews survived 1600 years of Christianity...They almost didn’t survive four years of World War II. Something different must have happened.”²³⁷ Katz’s

²³³ Steigmann-Gall, “Old Wine in New Bottles?”, 289.

²³⁴ Steinweis, Alan E., *Studying the Jew*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, 8.

²³⁵ Steinweis, *Studying the Jew*, 7,8.

²³⁶ Steigmann-Gall, “Old Wine in New Bottles?”, 287.

²³⁷ As quoted in Bergen, Doris L., “Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany,” *Central European History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 329.

argument is based on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, emphasizing that the forces at work here had to represent a manifest break from prior practices of anti-Judaism. The evil that the Nazis perpetuated must represent a break from the past.

Also worthy of mention is the fact that many confessional historians utilize this paradigm in order to distance Christianity from the Third Reich. Such scholars are hesitant to acknowledge the failings of both confessions, and end up putting forth some version of Christianity as the enemy of an NSDAP which attempted to “co-opt the authentic Church by creating a Nazi-based puppet church.”²³⁸ While this perception is not totally inaccurate, when coupled with a rejection of the link between Christian anti-Judaism and the NSDAP’s antisemitism, it has the effect of absolving church authorities of collaboration. Within this model, the Confessing Church’s resistance represents true Christianity, while the German Christians are false brethren. Such artificial dichotomies allow German Protestantism and Christian tradition to emerge from the conflict far less marred than an unbiased analysis would allow. Ultimately, this analysis of the relationship between German Protestantism and Christian anti-Judaism is unconvincing.

The second paradigm draws a direct line of descent from Christian anti-Judaism to the racially motivated antisemitism of Nazi Germany and claims that “Nazi antisemitism was essentially a branch on the tree of Christianity.”²³⁹ Focusing on the Nazis’ emphasis on the demonic powers of the Jews, Saul Friedländer argues in his *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* that such a focus and, by extension, the NSDAP’s antisemitism “can be explained only by its roots in the Christian tradition.”²⁴⁰ George Steiner agrees, stating

²³⁸ Steigmann-Gall, “Old Wine in New Bottles?”, 287.

²³⁹ Steigmann-Gall, “Old Wine in New Bottles?”, 289.

²⁴⁰ Friedländer, Saul, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939*, New York: Harper Collins, 1997, 85 as printed in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, 289.

that we cannot understand Nazi antisemitism if “we divorce its genesis and its radical enormity from theological origins.”²⁴¹ Kevin Spicer in the preface to *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust* rails against the “strict but misleading separation between Nazi ‘racial antisemitism’ and ‘Christian antisemitism’” and expresses the hope that his work will break down barriers between the two concepts.²⁴² Such viewpoints lack nuance because they do not respect the entry of race into the question of anti-Judaism. For late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century antisemitism, the baptism of Jews was no longer a desired outcome from the Christian point of view—at times it was not even an option for Jews who wished to assimilate into the dominant culture. This notion not only breaks sharply from established Christian conventions of Christian anti-Judaism. As we have seen, it even precipitated the radical step of ousting of clergy and parishioners of non-Aryan descent from the churches by German Christians. This nuance is not appreciated by the second paradigm’s scholars, who treat anti-Judaism and antisemitism as one and the same.

With this, we come to a more nuanced perspective, one that appreciates the distance between antisemitism and Christian anti-Judaism and yet pulls no punches, making certain to acknowledge the Christian tradition of anti-Judaism among the chief phenomena that precipitated the rise of antisemitism. In the words of a September 7, 2000 document signed by 200 rabbis and Jewish scholars, *Dabru Emet*, “Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it be taken out.”²⁴³ Likewise, Doris Bergen maintains, “it seems clear that a shared legacy of Christian

²⁴¹ Steiner, George, “Through that Glass Darkly,” in as printed in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, 289.

²⁴² Spicer, Kevin, “Preface,” *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ix.

²⁴³ As quoted in Steigmann-Gall, “Old Wine in New Bottles?,” 287.

ant-Judaism provided an important opening for Nazi ideas of race...it was certainly not the sole factor, but without it, the Holocaust could not have occurred.”²⁴⁴ Michael Phayer agrees, stating that, “traditional Christian [anti-Judaism] did not cause the Holocaust. However,..it conditioned some European Catholics to become part of Hitler’s murderous machinery.”²⁴⁵ Beyond what we have already seen, it would be easy to add examples of Nazi propaganda including references to the Jewish *Volk* (a racial category) and to the Jews’ supposed deicide (a religious concern) in the same arguments. While the two ideas are most certainly not the same, they reinforce each other and the NSDAP, realizing this, drew off both racial antisemitism and anti-Judaism to scapegoat the Jews.

The evidence we have considered clearly favors the third framework for thinking about anti-Judaism and antisemitism in relation to the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. It recognizes the role that Christianity’s extensive history of anti-Judaism had in allowing antisemitism to take hold, yet does not equate the two. It prevents cheap, intellectually simple equations of Nazism with Christianity, allows plenty of room for a critique of Christian ambivalence and hate, and destroys any possibility of completely absolving Christian faith through a dishonest dichotomy between a “true” (Confessing) Church and a false (German) Christianity. For, as scholarship has borne out, the German Christians and a fair portion of Nazis saw themselves as Christians and acting in Christian ways through their antisemitism. How else could Hitler say, “I recognize the representatives of this race as pestilent for the state and for the church and perhaps I am thereby doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions?”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Bergen, “Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany,” 348.

²⁴⁵ Phayer, Michael, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, Bloomington: IUP, 2000, 1.

²⁴⁶ As quoted in: Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 47.

Without Christian anti-Judaism there could be no antisemitism, If confessional historians and collaborators with the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* want to claim a status of oppression, presenting themselves as innocent victims of ecclesiastical power plays and forced “unchristian” doctrinal changes imposed by the Third Reich, they can only do so after granting that their “oppressor” would not have come into being in the first place without the contributions of Christian anti-Judaism. One of the touchstones that I find honest and persuasive regarding this matter is Martin Niemöller: “I have never concealed the fact and said it before the court in 1938 that I came from an anti-Semitic past and tradition...I believe that from 1933 I truly *represented the Lutheran-Christian outlook* on the Jewish question.”²⁴⁷ Niemöller willingly faces up to the reality that his Lutheran anti-Judaism allowed him to support the NSDAP’s antisemitic policies, adding that the “Lutheran-Christian outlook” is inherently predisposed to anti-Judaism. Niemöller is also willing to own up to the Christian guilt concerning Nazi Germany and the Holocaust:

We must openly declare that we are not innocent of the Nazi murders, of the murder of German communists, Poles, Jews, and the people in German-occupied countries. No doubt others made mistakes too, but the wave of crime started here and here it reached its highest peak. The guilt exists, there is no doubt about that — even if there were no other guilt than that of the six million clay urns containing the ashes of incinerated Jews from all over Europe. And this guilt lies heavily upon the German people and the German name, *even upon Christendom*. For in our world and in *our name* have these things been done.²⁴⁸

In the name of Christendom these things were done, precisely because Christianity had a long history of anti-Judaism that allowed such connections to be made. In this case, Niemöller is unafraid to assign guilt where guilt is due, and the major trends in Christian history that we have

²⁴⁷ As quoted in: Bentley, *Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984*, 334.

²⁴⁸ Bentley, *Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984*, 177.

traced certainly bear their lion share of guilt for creating an environment under which the NSDAP's antisemitism could take root.

Nevertheless, the complexities of this situation are also clear. The German Christian movement certainly did not represent orthodox Christian doctrine. We have noted its far-reaching changes to liturgy, worship, scripture, and church structure. Doris Bergen puts it this way: "The German Christians did not fit most standard theological criteria for Christians: that is, they rejected basic Christian teachings about the divinity and humanity of Jesus and renounced the canonicity of Christian scripture."²⁴⁹ While assigning guilt to the Church, one must also clearly understand that these changes, along with racially based antisemitism, do represent a break in the Christian tradition.

Properly speaking, Positive Christianity was a syncretic movement. For the purposes of this discussion, I favor J.H. Kamstra's definition of syncretism: "the coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or for example *in social structures*."²⁵⁰ It took the concepts of racial antisemitism, the *Volk*, Aryanism, Germanic paganism and spoke of them in the Christian language of faith. Nazism, with its sacralization of politics and rituals that some scholars have argued approach religious significance, used its power and influence to attempt to bring German Protestantism in line with party stances.²⁵¹ How can one argue that Nazism did not have intensely religious

²⁴⁹ Bergen, Doris L., "Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Jan 2007, 28.

²⁵⁰ Kamstra, J.H., *Op de Grens tussen Theologie en Godsdienstfenomenologie*, Leiden: Brill, 1970, 9-10, translated by: Michael Pye, as quoted in: *Dialogue and Syncretism: an Interdisciplinary Approach*, 10.

²⁵¹ See: Stowers, Stanley, "The Concepts of 'Religion', 'Political Religion' and the Study of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Jan. 2007, 9-24., Steigmann-Gall, Richard, "Christianity and the Nazi Movement: a Response," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Apr. 2007, 185-211.

aspects? Hitler Youth were taught to say a prayer to Hitler, modeled after the Lord's Prayer, before meals: "Führer, my Führer given me by God/ Protect and Preserve my life for long/ You rescued Germany from its greatest need./ I thank you for my daily bread./ Stay for a long time with me, leave me not./ Führer my Führer, my faith, my light/ Heil my Führer!"²⁵²

At his core, Hitler saw himself as the savior of the German people, ushering in a sort of messianic golden age for the Aryan race. Because of this, some scholars have advocated using the term "political religion" to refer to the NSDAP - although, as Stowers argues, "it was primarily opponents of National Socialism who characterized it as religious or a religion."²⁵³ Either way, many scholars see Nazism and Christianity as competing sources of meaning. For instance, Bergen claims, "Hitler's model of a future city of Germania left no room for churches, and as Gerhard Weinberg has pointed out, it is hard to take seriously the vague religious utterances of a Führer who thought that he was God himself!"²⁵⁴ Likewise, after 1937, the relationship between Hitler and German Christians cooled, and there are indications in NSDAP documents of party officials trying to imagine a future without churches.²⁵⁵ *Mein Kampf* reinforces this conception, calling National Socialism "a new Weltanschauung (worldview)," in opposition to both Capitalism and Marxism.²⁵⁶ To Hitler, there could only be one way of seeing the world, his way, and this left no room for alternative worldviews.

²⁵² "Parallel Journeys: World War II and the Holocaust Through the Eyes of Teens," Kennesaw State University History Museum Pamphlet, 2.

²⁵³ Stowers "The Concepts of 'Religion', 'Political Religion' and the Study of Nazism," 10.

²⁵⁴ Bergen, "Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals?," 32.

²⁵⁵ I reject the authenticity of *Table Talk*, which contains much of what some scholars cite as Hitler's patently anti-Christian ideas and Wilfried Daim's photograph of a Hitler-signed document calling for the "immediate and unconditional abolition of all religions after the final victory."

²⁵⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 694.

Positive Christianity, as a hegemonic form of syncretic religion, sought to silence all forms of Christianity that functioned counter-hegemonically with respect to NSDAP doctrines and policies. We will consider these alternatives more fully in the following section. However, this does not absolve German Protestant collaborators of their wrongdoing. Rather, it calls attention to the fact that there were a range of responses available, ranging from joining the resistance and the Confessing Church to marching in the streets with the German Christian movement. How individuals and systems chose to act in the face of the NSDAP matters. Moreover, “it may seem impossible to reconcile the vicious hatreds of Nazism with Christianity’s injunction to ‘turn the other cheek’...but the vast majority of Germans – over 95% by the last count in 1939 – evidently had no problem doing so.”²⁵⁷ What absolution, what peace, can there be for a church that “had no problem” accepting such a crude syncretism? There is no peace here. Martin Niemöller put it, “The guilt exists, there is no doubt about that — even if there were no other guilt than that of the six million clay urns containing the ashes of incinerated Jews from all over Europe.”²⁵⁸

Where Do We Go From Here?: Theological Legacies of the *Kirchenkampf*

While the guilt remains and we should not imagine that the people discussed in this section simply represent the “truth” or “essence” of a Christian response, nevertheless there have been constructive and noteworthy Christian responses to the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the *Shoah*. They represent some small positive legacy of the struggle, worth considering

²⁵⁷ Bergen, “Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals?”, 29.

²⁵⁸ Bentley, *Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984*, 177.

alongside the failures of Christianity in its perpetuation of anti-Judaism. As in the case of Luther, whose authority was claimed by both Positive Christians and the Confessing Church in a battle for hegemony, Christianity as a whole can be used in positive as well as negative ways.

Let us begin with the Confessing Church. Although the NSDAP-backed groups ultimately bent most of the church to its will, there were many voices of dissent; absolute silence was the one thing the German Christians desired but could not have. In 1933, one of the boldest voices of resistance made his intentions clear. Martin Niemöller, a former U-boat commander then serving as a Lutheran pastor, issued a circular letter. It called into being an “Emergency Alliance of Pastors, who...will be bound in their preaching by Holy Scripture and the Reformation confessions alone.”²⁵⁹ The letter’s final declaration made clear what pivotal event had precipitated such a decisive and risky action from a one-time NSDAP supporter: “I testify that with the application of the Aryan paragraph to the realm of the church of Christ the confessional stance has been violated.”²⁶¹ That is, as Helmreich has said, “It was the attempt to... remove Jewish Christians pastors from their post, that more than anything else ignited the so-called Church Struggle.”²⁶² Within four months of the circular letter’s circulation, Niemöller’s Pastors’ Emergency League had 6,000 pastors as members, and it played a prominent role in the struggle against the German Christians²⁶³ The league would go through many oscillations as NSDAP opposition strengthened. Eventually, Niemöller was put on trial for treason in 1937. Seen as a miscarriage of justice in most eyes, the trial resulted in seven month jail sentence.

²⁵⁹ “Circular Letter by Niemöller, 21 September 1933,” *The Third Reich and the German Churches*, 37. And Conway, John S., “The Political Theology of Martin Niemöller,” *German Studies Review* 9, no. 3, 1986: 524.

²⁶¹ Circular Letter by Niemöller, 21 September 1933,” *The Third Reich and the German Churches*, 38.

²⁶² Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 84.

²⁶³ Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 147.

Hitler ordered Niemöller to be taken to a concentration camp, where he remained Hitler's personal prisoner until the end of World War II.²⁶⁴

Although the Pastor's Emergency League was effectively suspended in 1938 by the loss of its leader, it played a significant role as the predecessor to the Confessing Church, that part of the Protestant church actively resisting the German Christian Movement. In January of 1934, the first "free synod"—the "First Confessing Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union"—was convened. It invited only those that "unreservedly held to the Old and New Testament as God's word and the only source of faith."²⁶⁵ As a result of the Pastor's Emergency League and Niemöller's efforts, this synod met at Barmen in May of 1934.²⁶⁶ It established the foundation for the new Confessing Church and has often been cited by subsequent scholars as an immensely important meeting.²⁶⁷ Framed on the theology of Karl Barth and executed on the labor of Niemöller, this Synod rejected "the false teaching that the church can and must recognize any other events, powers, personalities, and truths apart from and in addition to this one word of God."²⁶⁸ Perhaps more importantly, this synod rebuked the German Evangelical Church as illegitimate and portrayed the Confessing Church as the true church: "The present Reich Church Government has departed from this unalterable basis [the Gospel of Jesus Christ] and has committed countless breaches... Thereby it has forfeited its right to be the legitimate

²⁶⁴ Conway, *German Studies Review*, 535-536.

²⁶⁵ Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 160.

²⁶⁶ Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 161.

²⁶⁷ Ericksen, Robert P., "The Barmen Synod and Its Declaration: A Historical Synopsis," *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, ed. Hubert G. Locke, New York: 1984, 28-29.

²⁶⁸ "The Barmen Synod, 29-31 May 1934," *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 46.

leadership of the German Evangelical Church.”²⁶⁹ Although the intent of the Barmen synod was to make an ecclesiastical point —Niemöller even said that any portrayal of the Confessing Church as opposing to the state was “an outlandish lie”²⁷⁰ — it was nonetheless a sign “of potential opposition of the Nazi regime and appeared to be ‘the last refuge of freedom and independence in a land locked into gear and oppressed.’”²⁷¹

While the more moderate members of the Confessing Church even advocated retaining membership in the NSDAP, others were vehement in their political opposition. Karl Barth warned against the falsification of Christianity and the subordination of the Church to the NSDAP.²⁷² However, since the NSDAP and the church were so deeply intertwined, any criticism, whether ecclesiastical or political, of church affairs and the state-backed German Christians was interpreted as a threat to the stability of the Reich; the Confessing Church never gained official recognition by the NSDAP. In March of 1935, 700 pastors were arrested for treason, and by later that year, the Confessing Church had become an underground movement.²⁷³ The NSDAP increasingly characterized the Confessing Church as un-German and treasonous, and, as a result, it increased the Gestapo efforts to combat the Confessing Church’s perceived threat. The Gestapo were present at every public Confessing Church meeting, taking notes, following known Confessing Church members, and even attacking and beating young

²⁶⁹ “The Barmen Synod, 29-31 May 1934,” *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 47.

²⁷⁰ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 57.

²⁷¹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* Barnett, Victoria, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, New York: 1992, 55.

²⁷² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 41.

²⁷³ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 59, 63.

Confessing Church pastors.²⁷⁴ By the time of World War II, the Confessing Church had become less prominent. Having been deprived of its leaders through imprisonment and having lost morale due to constant surveillance and threats, most of its members welcomed the fact that “the Church struggle was to be put on ice for the duration of the war, so that all could unite behind the war effort.”²⁷⁵

Even with all its faults, the Confessing Church represented the best case of ecclesiastical resistance to German Christianity. Probably the best representation of the Confessing Church carrying ecclesiastical concerns into the political realm is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was arrested on April 5, 1943 for collaborating with the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence) to assassinate Hitler.²⁷⁶ Executed on April 9, 1945, some of his most apt and meaningful words were, “When Christ calls a man, He calls him to come and die.”²⁷⁷ The Confessing Church represents one of the positive legacies on which Christianity can build. Of course, we must beware of the danger of using the Confessing Church as our sole account. If we embrace their rhetoric – that they represent the “true” church in critique of the Reich Church – too enthusiastically, we risk glossing over the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism that we have stressed throughout this thesis. Nevertheless,, having both accounts at our disposal remains important—either one without the other provides insufficient grounds for analyzing the potential of the Christian tradition.

²⁷⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 77-83.

²⁷⁵ Conway, J. S., “The German Church Struggle: Its Making and Meaning,” *The Church Confronts the Nazis*, 111.

²⁷⁶ Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 346.

²⁷⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 200.

A Crisis of Faith: Theological Responses to the Shoah

While the Confessing Church represents one positive reaction to the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, there are additional responses to the *Shoah* that provide helpful resources for Christianity to build on. This response is particularly important because it represents both a dialogue with the Third Reich's antisemitism and a reflection on its meaning for Christians today. It will be useful to begin with theological debates that emerged within Judaism. Later, we will take a look at the Christian theological response to the *Shoah* through an analysis of the theology of Dorothee Sölle.

The central question that presents itself when thinking theologically about the *Shoah* is “Where was God, and how could such an all-powerful being allow the infliction of suffering on untold millions of people?” Elie Wiesel provides a lens through which to understand the impact of the *Shoah* on conceptions of God:

Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever... Never shall I forget the moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God himself. Never.²⁷⁸

Eiezer Berkovits puts it this way, “for our generation [Wiesel’s] Auschwitz represents the supreme crisis of faith.”²⁷⁹ For the Jews, it was a retelling of the story of Job, but without God’s final vindicating appearance in the whirlwind. Instead of a voice proclaiming His majesty as made known in creation, the Jews received silence, a silence that was almost deafening.

Auschwitz rang “a death knell for at least a certain type of Western Civilization.”²⁸⁰ This was

²⁷⁸ Wiesel, Elie, *Night*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1960, 43-44.

²⁷⁹ Berkovits, Eliezer, *Faith After the Holocaust*, New York: KTAV Publishers, 1973, 68.

²⁸⁰ Fleischner, Eva, *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York: KTAV Publishing, 1977, x.

what one of the characters in Cormac McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited* speaks of when he contends, "Western Civilization finally went up in the smokestacks of Dachau."²⁸¹ The central theological difficulty, put eloquently by Irving Greenberg, is "whether even those who believe after such an event dare talk about [a] God who loves and cares without making a mockery out of those who suffered."²⁸²

Having witnessed such a fundamental break with the past, one's view of God must likewise change. One of the theological movements that emerged after the *Shoah* was the Death of God movement²⁸³, which contends, "When a civilization dies, its God dies with it."²⁸⁴ This can take the form of outright Atheism or Agnosticism, but the far more interesting version has import for those who still assert faith in what they call "God." For them, the death of God means the death of traditional theistic conceptions of God and the birth of a new way of looking at God. To them, "the testimony of the six million is so strong that it all but irretrievably *closes out religious language*... Therefore the religious enterprise after this event must see itself as a desperate attempt to create, save, and heal the image of God wherever it still exists."²⁸⁵ Rabbi Yitzhak Greenberg pushes the dialogue even further: "Let us offer, then, as a working principle, the following. No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible

²⁸¹ McCarthy, Cormac, *The Sunset Limited*.

²⁸² Greenberg, Irving, "Theological Reflections on the Holocaust," *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York: KTAV Publishing, 1977, 11.

²⁸³This movement is exceedingly complex and multifaceted, but the discussions here, much like in Chapter two are representative and help give us a focus and at least a limited grasp of the movement and its larger complexities.

²⁸⁴ Berkovitz, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 50.

²⁸⁵ Greenberg, "Theological Reflections on the Holocaust," 42.

in the presence of burning children.”²⁸⁶ This new theology cannot be ashamed to speak its truth in their midst. To say the destruction of millions was willed by God through his non-intervention is to both create a monster-God and give an event divine sanction and meaning that quite possibly “has no theological explanation.”²⁸⁷ Having fundamentally changed the way one sees God, this new theology also seeks a new worship. David Powers, at the 1983 meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, asked, “Can we in truth celebrate the Eucharist after the Nazi Holocaust and in fact of an imminent nuclear holocaust, and in a world half populated by refugees, in the same way as we did before the occurrence of such horrors?”²⁸⁸

It might be helpful here to let one such theologian speak for herself: the German Protestant Dorothee Sölle, who artfully articulates her theological reflections on the *Shoah*, while keeping them astonishingly accessible. Sölle describes theological conceptions of God that fail to account for Auschwitz as describing a “Wholly Other God,” who is “completely independent from all God’s creatures...God and God alone could have hindered it [the *Shoah*] but God’s ways are not our ways.”²⁸⁹ She goes as far as to claim, “An all-powerful God who imposes suffering, who looks down on Auschwitz from above, must be a sadist.” She even traces her theological development back to Auschwitz, after which “it seemed inconceivable to me to retain love and omnipotence within the father image.”²⁹⁰ She sees the end of theistic representations of

²⁸⁶ As quoted in: Ed. David M. Szonyi, *The Holocaust: An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide*, New York: KTAV, 1985, 369.

²⁸⁷ Rosenberg, Shalom, “The Holocaust: Lessons, Explanation, Meaning,” *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, New York: New York University Press, 2005, 90.

²⁸⁸ As quoted in: Pawlikowski, John T., “Liturgy and the Holocaust: How Do We Worship in an Age of Genocide?”, *Christian Responses to the Holocaust*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003, 168.

²⁸⁹ Sölle, Dorothee, *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God*, trans. by Joyce L. Irwin, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 14.

²⁹⁰ Sölle, *Theology for Skeptics*, 26.

God as “an opportunity finally to be able to speak of God in a concrete way, in a way related to praxis.”²⁹¹ This involves bearing witness to the fact that “God stands on the side of the victims and is thought to be capable of suffering...All suffering persons are in the presence of God.”²⁹² This God, “in the Nazi period in Germany was small and weak,” because He “needs people in order to come into being.”²⁹³ In this way, “no one can say that God, in the form of this shekinah, hangs on the gallows at Auschwitz.”²⁹⁴ Elie Wiesel is proved correct, and even though “no heaven can rectify Auschwitz...[nevertheless] the God who is not a greater Pharaoh has justified himself: in sharing the suffering, in sharing the death on the cross.”²⁹⁵ Instead of an almighty God, who sits in heaven and reigns in absolute glory and authority, “Jesus continues to die before our eyes: his death has not ended. He suffers wherever people are tormented. If we thought about Jesus’ death only in a historical sense, without meditating on its ongoing nature, then this remembrance would remain a liturgy devoid of truth.”²⁹⁶ Explicitly drawing on Bonhoeffer’s conception of Jesus as a “man for others,” Sölle crafts an extensive and persuasive theological framework for accessing God and reality after Auschwitz. Because of its impact on Western Civilization and the world, it must be addressed for Christians, but it can turn into a situation much like the Vietnam War presented in America, where priests routinely protested with signs reading “Another crucifixion in Indochina.” These priests Christianized the conflict without ever stopping to think about whether or not Vietnamese children wanted to be considered linked to a

²⁹¹ Sölle, Dorothee, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology*, Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990, 172.

²⁹² Sölle, *Thinking About God*, 65,72.

²⁹³ Sölle, *Theology for Skeptics*, 15.

²⁹⁴ Sölle, Dorothee, *Suffering*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, 146.

²⁹⁵ Sölle, *Suffering*, 149.

²⁹⁶ Sölle, *Suffering*, 140.

Palestinian Jew's crucifixion in 33CE. As Sölle would surely agree, we must be careful not to Christianize Auschwitz. Her concern is not to incorporate Jews in a Christian project, but rather to conceptualize a form of Christian thought and practice that can respond with integrity to extreme suffering and injustice. Although she is concerned with many forms of suffering, Auschwitz of course represents one of the paradigmatic cases, especially for a German of Soelle's generation. In this way, she serves as a representative figure, speaking as one voice in a larger movement, for our discussion of positive theological legacies and reflection on the *Shoah*, Christian anti-Judaism, and the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*.

Legacies of the *Kirchenkampf*

Continuing the above discourse on present-day reflections on these conflicts, we can arrive at a discussion of the *Kirchenkampf*'s legacy. On some levels, the *Kirchenkampf* continues to function as a “touchstone of reality”²⁹⁷ for Protestantism worldwide. For instance, Hulsether recalls in his *Building a Protestant Left* how he “heard comparisons between the German liturgy imposed by Hitler and the feminist movement for gender-inclusive language,” critiquing the fact that, in both cases, “humans were daring to change religious traditions for historical reasons.”²⁹⁸ He also speaks about “Munich analogies run amok” and misapplications of Christian realism during the Cold War, Suez Crisis, Algerian Revolution, and crisis in Lebanon.²⁹⁹ The changes in German Protestantism instituted by the Third Reich came to serve as a harsh, foreboding

²⁹⁷ Friedman, Maurice, “Why Joseph Campbell’s Psychologizing of Myth Precludes the Holocaust,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 1998, 387.

²⁹⁸ Hulsether, Mark, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis, 1941-1993*, Knoxville: UT Press, 1999, 268.

²⁹⁹ Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left*, 271, 88.

reminder of the dangers of reimagining traditions to see God working through political movements. At the same time, Protestant theologians harkened back to the *Kirchenkampf* and, more specifically, the Confessing Church as emblematic of the need to be prophetic and stand up for the true faith in the face of persecution and “false” Christianity.

It is fitting that one should both begin and end the discussion of the German Church Conflict with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The issue of Bonhoeffer’s legacy is particularly revealing in one’s analysis of reactions by the church and German people to the Third Reich after World War II. Outside of Germany he is widely regarded as “one of the most creative minds in contemporary theology”; moreover, “few of the important issues in theology today have escaped the influence of his powerful pen.”³⁰¹ His writings and story became touchstones for times of struggle, including the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle against South African Apartheid.³⁰² Recalling Bonhoeffer’s declaration of *status confessionis* in response to the Aryan Paragraph, the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1997 appealed to the “white member churches in southern Africa to recognize that the situation in southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith... churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing Apartheid system.”³⁰³ Importantly, the God of Bonhoeffer is “always God for us precisely today,” being present in one’s reality, in one’s struggle.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Klassen, A. J., *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981, vii.

³⁰² Richardson, Neville, “Apartheid, Heresy, and the Church in South Africa,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1986, 10.

³⁰³ Pero, Albert, “The Relationship of the Christian Faith to the Events in South Africa,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1987, 286-87.

³⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 1, Mucich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1958, 144f.

Building from Bonhoeffer's conceptualization of God, James Cone, liberation theologian and Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, claims that, "taking our clue from the historical Jesus who is pictured in the New Testament as the Oppressed One, what else, except blackness, could adequately tell us the meaning of his presence today?"³⁰⁵ Cone's theology "involved radical repentance, and its cost was death."³⁰⁶ How striking that during the German Church Conflict, using Cone's logic, Jesus must have been a Jew, eventually dying for those oppressed.

Needless to say, Bonhoeffer enjoys considerable fame and an overall important legacy outside Germany, but what about his legacy within Germany? For decades after World War II, he was characterized as a "traitor who disobeyed authority and undermined the Germany war effort," and, tellingly, it was not until August of 1996 that he was officially absolved of his traitor status.³⁰⁷ Indeed, Bishop Meiser, a colleague of Bonhoeffer's, declined to attend his memorial service, making it clear that the "murdered theologian was not a Christian martyr but a political one," a line which, in Bonhoeffer's case, is extremely thin, much like the line between church and state in the German Christian Movement.³⁰⁸ Even though some of his colleagues saw his death as merely political as opposed to martyrdom, there were also German Protestants who came to rely on Bonhoeffer's legacy and writings. We have seen how Sölle, like Bonhoeffer, came to realize that "only a suffering God can help," rejecting the omnipotence of God in favor of one who suffers alongside the downtrodden.³⁰⁹ Likewise, in East Germany, "defined as it was

³⁰⁵ Cone, James, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis, 1990, 120.

³⁰⁶ Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left*, 193. Bonhoeffer: "When Christ calls a man, He calls him to come and die."

³⁰⁷ DeGrunchy, John W., "Bonhoeffer's Legacy: A New Generation," *The Christian Century*, April 2, 1997, 343.

³⁰⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 200.

³⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York: Macmillan, 1954, 361. See Sölle's *Suffering*.

in antifascist terms,” Bonhoeffer “had his place of honor.”³¹⁰ Like the issue of admitting guilt in a post-WWII Germany, the legacy of Bonhoeffer elicited a highly mixed response. Regardless of the reputation he enjoys in or outside of Germany, it is clear that Bonhoeffer is an influential figure, one the world can ill afford to ignore, a figure born out of this *Kirchenkampf*, this struggle to defend the church and make it a “church for others,” a church for the oppressed.³¹¹

Concluding Remarks

The legacy of Christian anti-Judaism paved the way for the antisemitic liturgy, worship, and exegesis of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. Christianity is forced to recognize that it, in some ways, helped to create the monster that the Confessing Church claims to be fighting against. However, Christian anti-Judaism is not interchangeable with the antisemitism of the Third Reich and, by extension, the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. As we have seen, race and nationalism play important roles in shaping the form of antisemitism that lead to the *Shoah*. These realizations neither absolve Christian traditions of blame, nor reveal them as completely bankrupt.

Moreover, these conversations are framed by the term “legacy.” Importantly, historical memories can be wielded in varying ways, and, in the case of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, the NSDAP wielded the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the battle for hegemony in which they engaged. They effectively used it as a preexisting framework to build their conceptions of the Jews as a race and a people. However, we also have also seen how Christian reflections to the *Kirchenkampf* and *Shoah* represent an alternative legacy, and that later theologies have been able

³¹⁰ Baum, Gregory, *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, 88.

³¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280-281.

utilize and draw upon other, more positive, legacies within Christianity in constructing their response. It behooves us, then, not to look at the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the Confessing Church in terms of falsehood and truth, but in terms of two constructs wielding different legacies within Christianity in pursuit of hegemony, much like we encountered in the earlier case of Luther's legacy. They are part of a larger discourse of boundary maintenance within Christianity, proposing, at their core, different answers to the basic question of who speaks for Christianity (and/or the Christian). Who gets to decide who is allowed to claim that moniker and on what grounds?

In proposing these alternative legacies, I am essentially arguing that Christianity's legacy of anti-Judaism is not the whole story. There are claims to truth that emerge from this conflict which are more positive and — importantly — also more persuasive. If on one pole, there is the German Christian prayers to Hitler and obeisance to his forcible coordination, on the other pole stands the courageous examples of the Confessing Church and the Barmen Declaration of 1934. The legacies that I recommend as a partial counterweight to the negative legacy of Christian anti-Judaism *explicitly* recognize the guilt that the Christian tradition had in constructing the framework for the NSDAP's antisemitism. However, they use that knowledge to power a critique of their own traditions. They apply the lessons learned from both the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the Confessing Church to their praxis, seeking not to legitimate tyranny, oppression, and hate but to act counter-hegemonically against oppressors for the sake of liberating the oppressed.

It is imperative that we do not become enamored with either end of this spectrum, but rather recognize the full range of interpretations and legacies that Christianity has at its disposal. Neither the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* nor the Confessing Church can stand alone without

fundamentally distorting the picture of events that this thesis has laid out. In the end, we must view these two entities as being dialogue with each other, contesting each other for hegemony and control. In a strange way, they needed each other to formulate their own truth claims.

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